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TALES

OF

THE COLONIES.

VOL. I.

G. WOODFALL, ANGEL COURT, SKINNER STREET, LONDON.

TALES

OF

THE COLONIES.

BY

JOHN HOWISON,

OF THE HONOURABLE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S SERVICE,

AUTHOR OF "SKETCHES OF UPPER CANADA," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE ISLAND.

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CHAPTER I.

On the dreariest part of the north coast of Ireland, and at the bottom of a small bay, there is a village inhabited chiefly by fishermen, who also occasionally exercise the trade of smugglers. The adjoining coast is almost perpendicular, and is rendered nearly unapproachable by ranges of black rock, which lie parallel to its outline, and about half a mile from the shore. On these, during high winds, the sea beats with tremendous violence; and at such times, even in the darkest nights, the meteoric gleam of the flashing foam may be distinguished by watchful seamen at a league's distance.

Vessels of a large class are seldom seen on a part of the coast so dangerous and unsheltered; but many small craft, engaged in the contraband trade, make the bay above mentioned their port of refuge, and its village a depôt for their merchandize. On these accounts the inhabitants enjoy an intercourse with the world, and an influx of its luxuries and conveniences, which the seclusion of their situation would at first view seem to render impossible; but still they are comparatively rude and uncivilized, and their village presents no attractions to any one but a smuggler. In it, however, lived an individual who had no pretensions to a character of the kind, and who infinitely surpassed his neighbours in mental acquirements, polish of manners, and knowledge of the world. Austin Deller had lost both his parents at an early age, and had entered the navy rather through necessity than inclination; however, he did not long continue in a service which he had disliked from the first. Shortly after his promotion to a lieutenancy, he had, in a moment of just irritation, used insubordinate language to his captain, who brought him to a court martial; and the result was, that

he received his Majesty's permission to retire upon half pay. Availing himself of this alternative, he repaired to the village just described, and took possession of a small house and property, which a relation had bequeathed to him some years before.

Austin Deller here lived a life of monotony and retirement, seeing his neighbours daily, but conversing with them only when courtesy required that he should do so. However, his intercourse with the priest of the village formed an exception to his solitude. Father Domont was a middle-aged man, of active habits, and of a bold and inquisitive spirit. His duties were extensive and fatiguing, for they embraced a large, though thinly peopled district, and he performed them with punctuality, but at the same time with such visible discontent and impatience, as shewed how uncongenial they were to his mind. He had a restless curiosity which urged him to inquire minutely into other men's affairs, and into the actual condition of people moving in a sphere different from his own. He loved to question those who had been abroad, respecting the manners, modes of life, and enjoyments of

foreigners; and when such points were represented in a pleasing light, he would become silent for a time, as if employed in contrasting his own lot with that of other more favoured mortals. He affected to reprobate the power and license enjoyed by the priesthood in Catholic countries in Europe, but was never tired of listening to details in which those subjects were exemplified. He took particular pains to inform every one with whom he came into contact, that his condition neither corresponded with his wishes nor with his deserts; and that he trusted that Fortune would make him future amends for her present unkindness. Often did he force his company upon Austin, and induce him to describe his naval adventures, and the varied scenes and characters to which his wandering life had at different times introduced him; and the latter, although he rather disliked his interrogator, and felt little pleasure in recalling past events, seldom withheld the desired narrative and information.

Austin's house, though small, was, next to the tavern, the most comfortable and respectable in the village. In his sitting room, which over-

looked the bay, hung several prints, representing sea-views and naval engagements; and a small number of often perused books formed the only other ornamental things in the apartment. The tenor of his life was marked by a drowsy sameness, which alike depressed his spirits, and wearied his patience. He was sanguine in temperament, ambitiously inclined, and anxious for excitement, and shuddered at the idea of spending his days in the obscure retirement of a country village, though poverty had forced him to take up a temporary abode in a place of the kind. The produce of his fields and garden, together with his half pay, was scarcely sufficient for his subsistence. His daily pleasures consisted in a morning stroll along the rock-bound coast, or a little sailing excursion in a fishing boat borrowed from one of the villagers; while, in the evening he either sat musing alone by his fire-side, or had an hour's conversation with Father Domont. But he felt little pleasure in this person's society; for, although their mutual discontent might seem calculated to form a bond of sympathy between them, it had not that effect, the priest's desires being much more worldly,

and less lofty in their nature, than those in which Austin was accustomed to indulge. He wished to engage in the bustle of active life, not with a view to the attainment of wealth and power, but that he might enjoy the chance of being placed in situations of strong interest and excitement, and find means of acquiring personal distinction. Refined society too had strong charms in his eyes. He had sometimes, in the course of his naval life, been a guest at balls and fêtes on a grand scale; and when the remembrance of these unfolded itself in his mind, like a gorgeous picture, he would view the objects around him with increased irritation and disgust, and feel additionally anxious to effect a change in his condition. But he knew too much of the world to have any idea of seeking his fortune like a knight-errant; while, at the same time, a view of his barren little property, and a glance at the half pay list, were sufficient to repress any hope of his being able to improve his lot by the limited means which he could actually command.

Austin had led this kind of life nearly eight months, when a stranger arrived in the village,

and took up his abode at the inn. He neither explained who or what he was, nor did his personal appearance throw any light upon these points, though it was sufficiently remarkable to render the solution of them both desirable and interesting. He seemed to be about sixty years old, judging rather from his white hair and shrunken features than from any appearance of bodily feebleness or decrepitude, for he was active and erect, and had at the same time the easy and careless deportment of one who had been accustomed to command and to be obeyed. His countenance was sun-burnt and weather-beaten, but highly expressive, and his eyes were incessantly moving from one object to another, apparently more from a habit of acute watchfulness than from curiosity to observe the things around him. His manners were affable and confident, and he seemed to regard the villagers with a kind of good natured contempt, although he could not be said to assume any degree of personal importance while amongst them. His inquiries and remarks soon shewed that he was an experienced seaman; and indeed, on the evening of his arrival, the knowing look with which

he contemplated the bay and the adjoining coast, proved this at once to the initiated who happened to be standing near him at the time. His dress did not bespeak either wealth or poverty, or any particular rank of life; and he always carried in his hand a curious serpentine walking-stick, having the upper extremity carved into a human figure like an Indian idol, with a massy ring of pure gold round its waist, and two small emeralds fixed in its head, in imitation of eyes.

The first intimation that Austin received of this stranger's having taken up his abode in the village, was from Father Domont. "I am unable to discover what he is," observed the latter, "but perhaps you may be more successful, particularly as sea-faring people have a predilection for the society of persons of their own profession. You had better call upon him; it will merely be a piece of civility, which you know is what we all owe to one another."

"I intend to allow him to make the first advances," replied Austin. "My circumstances do not admit of my shewing hospitality to any one, and what is the use of the ceremony without the substance?"

"True, true," rejoined the priest, "but still one likes to have one's curiosity satisfied. I suspect that Mr. Herkarl, as he calls himself, is a heretic. He has neither attended mass yet, nor come to make confession. I think he is rich too. I dare say he has acquired his wealth wickedly abroad, and expects to square matters by spending it honestly at home; but that won't do, let me tell you."

"You are rather uncharitably inclined this morning," said Austin. "First prove the existence of his wealth, and then you may indulge in conclusions as to how he has obtained it. I must confess that I feel little interest in the matter."

"Because you have not seen Mr. Herkarl," replied Domont. "I assure you he is no common person, and I can lay claim to some penetration in affairs of this kind. A slight glance at any individual enables me to discover whether or not he has spent all his life on British ground, and the longer he has been abroad, the more curiosity I feel to learn his history. I am much mistaken if this Mr. Herkarl cannot tell a few stories about himself which would be well worth

hearing. But I hope he may come to confession after all."

This conversation awakened in Austin a desire to meet with the stranger, which was soon gratified; for that same day, while pursuing his usual ramble along the top of the cliffs, he passed an individual whom he could not doubt to be him. Austin continued his walk for a little time, and then turned round to observe his fellow pedestrian, who had now seated himself near the edge of the precipice, and was gazing upon the bay which lay expanded before him, and sometimes placing his walking-stick at different angles, as if he wished to take the bearings of some particular point of land. It was the end of June, and the weather was calm and beautifully serene. The surface of the sea was without a single ripple, except at one place where the tide, then flowing, had to force its way through various narrow channels formed by large masses of rock which lay within a few yards of each other, forming an irregular series of bulwarks that extended in a line across the whole entrance to the bay. The water flowed gently between these, with a mur-

muring like that of a river, and, gradually losing its impulse as it advanced, at length diffused itself imperceptibly over the tranquil expanse near the shore. Two small boats floated about unchecked by anchor or sails, while their owners were engaged in fishing with hook and line. A sloop lay moored outside of the bay, and the distant horizon was specked with the extended canvass of a vessel impelled by a breeze unfelt upon the land, and pursuing her voyage to some tropical clime.

Austin and Mr. Herkarl continued to enjoy this scene for a considerable time, but without having any communication, for they separately returned to their respective homes. However, daily rencontres in the course of their walks, soon made them familiar with each other's persons, and an acquaintance and intercourse were at length brought about in the following manner.

It has already been mentioned that one of Austin's favourite amusements was pleasure-sailing. While engaged in this on a morning similar to that above described, he observed Mr. Herkarl standing upon a ledge of rock near the entrance of the bay, and saw that, the sea having

got between him and the main shore, he was preparing to step among the waves, that he might regain it without loss of time, the tide flowing in very rapidly. Austin called to him to refrain, and bringing his boat close to the rocks, took him on board, and offered to land him at whatever place might be agreeable.

"I thank you," returned Mr. Herkarl, "but your politeness makes me desirous of enjoying more of your company. Allow me to be a partner in your excursion; I may be of some use, for we are now upon that element which I may call my natural one. I have led a sea-life nearly thirty years; and, judging from the skill with which you manage this little bark, I should suspect that your voyages often have been of a more extended kind than what we can hope to make to-day."

"There you are correct," said Austin; "I once served in the British navy. I love the sea, though I found no pleasure in following it as a profession."

"That may easily be," replied Herkarl. "I know nothing of the discipline and ceremonies of naval life. My voyages have commonly been

made for the general advantage of the whole party on board. We had no compulsion amongst us, and every one was at liberty to take himself off whenever he felt inclined. But may I ask in what part of the world you have chiefly sailed?"

"On the coast of North America," returned Austin, "and also in the West India seas. I once cruised ten months between the Gulf of Florida and the Leeward Islands.

"I know every inch of the ground," cried Herkarl, with animation. "What a navigation it is upon the north side of Cuba! Why, all the little channels and inlets in this bay are nothing to the intricacies of the Bahama Banks. That is the place for a display of good seamanship. I recollect ploughing through a sand-bank there in a sharp-bottomed schooner for nearly two hours, and getting clear without damage after all. We anchored among some rocky islets about sun-set, and were still in the midst of shoals, the sea appearing to be variegated in the most extraordinary way; light green where there was sand, and nearly black where there were rocks, and of its natural colour where deep water was to be found."

"These things are familiar to me," said Austin, "though I never was exposed to any danger while on the Bahama Banks. Were you in a trading vessel at the time you are speaking of?"

"Yes; a fair trader, and a free one," replied Herkarl, with a smile. "But if you have cruised about the Gulf of Florida and its neighbourhood, you must remember the rock called the Hole in the Wall, and the villainous little island of Anguilla. I was nearly lost upon it once. We dragged anchor during the night, and when morning dawned found our stern within a quarter of a mile of its black cliffs, and the wind directly a-head of us. However, we contrived to make sail, and to bear away, but I was never so near being wrecked, either before or since."

"I perceive that you have led a life of adventure," said Austin, "which I believe to be the happiest while one is actually engaged in its spirit-stirring scenes."

"Yes; then, and then only," returned Herkarl, in a grave manner. "In the tumult of novelty and exciting events one is liable to be hurried into the commission of acts of which he

will afterwards have occasion to repent. But let us stretch out a little way; the sea and sky are equally inviting."

In this and similar conversation they passed nearly two hours, and then steered for the shore, and disembarked. Next day, Mr. Herkarl visited Austin at his own house, and, informing him that he had taken lodgings in the village, where he intended to remain some weeks, hoped they might become better acquainted. To this Austin was well disposed, and subsequently they fell into the habit of spending a great part of the day in each other's company; sometimes walking together, and sometimes indulging in sailing excursions in the neighbourhood of the bay. Mr. Herkarl proved a most agreeable and interesting associate, though he did not seem inclined to explain who he was, or what rank he held in society. His manners were bold and unembarrassed, and his opinions strictly honourable, though rather lax upon some subjects. His mind was well stored with practical knowledge of various kinds, but destitute of much refinement. His conversation was in general highly animated and characteristic, and abounded in

anecdotes and extraordinary adventures, nearly all of which he described as having taken place in foreign and distant countries.

The intimacy of the two friends was viewed with much curiosity and suspicion by Father Domont. He had been totally unsuccessful in his endeavours to gain the confidence of Herkarl, who, indeed, seemed to regard him with dislike, and to avoid his company. He therefore became the more assiduous in cross-questioning Austin respecting his mysterious companion, and when the former continued to affirm, that Herkarl had not hitherto communicated any particulars concerning himself, the priest disbelieved the assertion, and felt convinced that many secrets had been confided to him by the stranger. Often when Austin and Herkarl were conversing, Domont would linger at a little distance, or suddenly join them, evidently with the intention of overhearing what passed between them. On these occasions, no words of any particular or interesting import had ever caught his ear; but still such was his character, that these disappointments totally failed to set at rest his inquisitive spirit.

Herkarl had resided about three weeks in the village, when he proposed to Austin to engage a boat, and to make a little voyage considerably beyond the bay. This was easily arranged, and the two friends set sail one serene morning, and having got into the open sea, followed the line of the coast for several miles, and amused themselves by putting into every little cove that indented the lofty cliffs composing the breast of the land.

"It was thus that I used to enjoy myself while a youth," said Herkarl. "Even after I had made several long voyages, I would employ my leisure time in mimic excursions for the purpose of nautical discovery. Embarking in my shallop, with a compass, a log line, and a quadrant, I would steer by a certain point, try how many knots I was going, and take an observation for the latitude; drawing plans of inlets not ten yards in width, and regularly sounding where there was not water enough to drown me. I sometimes went so far as to write a report of my voyage for the information of an imaginary superior officer, and to describe the country and its productions. The occurrence of

a smart breeze of wind delighted me, and if it was accompanied with rain, so much the better, for I could then say that I had encountered bad weather. You see that I even now feel a little of that exploring spirit, though I have completed sixty-five years in this world."

"I should not have thought you so old," returned Austin. "You seem to have led a life of activity and hardship, and yet to enjoy an exemption from the ills which such a one usually entails upon the human constitution. Yet, after all, it is the best and most desirable. Nothing can be more insipid than the daily consciousness of security, and the undisturbed possession of the common comforts of life, and nothing more."

"I agree with you," said Herkarl, "and love your restlessness of spirit. I see that you are discontented with your present situation, and are anxious to exchange it for one of a more animated and energetic character. The life which you lead must indeed be wearying to an ardent mind."

"Alas," replied Austin, "I have no hopes of being able to improve my lot at present. I am too poor to choose how or where I shall live; my prospects are indeed very discouraging, for my

best years are flying away unvalued and unemployed."

"Believe me I sympathize with you," replied Herkarl; "for I well remember the time when I experienced feelings similar to those you express. But now I am fast descending into the vale of years, and all that I can reasonably look forward to, is, that I may die easily and soon. I have no ties upon the world. I have lately arrived from abroad and travelled through a great part of Ireland in search of a sister whom I last saw about thirty years ago. I obtained intelligence in this neighbourhood that she has been dead for a long period, and on continuing my journey, which was now without a purpose, accident brought me to this village. I resolved to remain in it a few days, that I might determine upon a plan for the future, but the pleasure I find in your acquaintance, has induced me to prolong my stay far beyond what I at first intended. I am poor, but might have been rich, nay, might still be so; but what avails it at my advanced age? Austin Deller," continued he with emotion, "I respect and esteem you, and would wish to do you good. Fortune

has been unkind to you. Have you boldness enough to force her to be the reverse?"

"I do not exactly understand you," replied Austin, "but my heart tells me that I have courage to undertake and pursue any enterprize, however dangerous and uncertain, provided it be a just and honourable one."

"Dismiss all fears on that head," said Herkarl. "Know, then, that I can change the current of fate, and elevate you to wealth and consequence. I have chosen you to be the depositary of a secret, the possession of which would be coveted by nine-tenths of the human race. I have often wished to communicate it, but have never till now met with one who, I could feel confident, would not abuse the power which the disclosure will place in his hands. But first answer me a question; are you a Catholic?"

"No," returned Austin; "I am a Protestant, and have always been so."

"'Tis well," replied Herkarl. "Not that I think one faith better than another, but had you been of the Romish church, you might have conceived it lawful to reveal my secret to the

priest in confession, and also might have scrupled to make free use of the advantages which belong to the knowledge of it: but I am satisfied, and desire no further avowal of your religious opinions. But you must make oath that you will not reveal to any one the circumstance which I am about to disclose, unless for the purpose of obtaining an assistant to enable you to secure the object which will be placed within your reach."

"Your conditions seem to be very various and complicated," said Austin, "but as you intend to confer a kindness upon me, I am ready to accede to them all, and therefore take the oath which you require."

The clouds had gradually been gathering during the day, and the sky was now very much overcast. A torrent of rain suddenly descended, and the wind began to get strong and variable. "Things wear an unfavourable aspect," said Herkarl, "I will not at present make the promised communication. Let us get ashore, and you shall visit me this evening after sunset, and be informed of every thing." Austin, much as his curiosity was excited, did not disapprove of his companion's suggestion, and

they accordingly made for the land, and disembarked wet and cold, and returned to their respective abodes.

In the twilight, Father Domont called upon Austin, with the intention of having an hour's conversation; but the latter was obliged to decline that pleasure, telling his visitor, that he had engaged to meet Mr. Herkarl that night for a particular purpose, which could not be deferred. The priest heard this with some surprise, and immediately took leave, while Austin hastened to keep his appointment.

It has already been mentioned, that Mr. Herkarl had taken lodgings in the village. These were in the house of a fisherman of the better class, and were on the upper floor, which consisted of three small rooms, two of which Mr. Herkarl occupied, the third remaining empty and untenanted. Austin found his friend seated by a cheerful fire, and apparently awaiting his arrival, but at the same time overlooking some rolls of paper like charts, which lay upon the table. "Close the door and be seated," said Herkarl. "Here we can converse without the risk of being overheard or interrupted. Of

course you have heard of the buccaneers of America." Austin replied in the affirmative. "Then," continued the former, "you see before you one of their legitimate descendants; though I am not to be regarded with the abhorrence which is generally excited by the name of the despoilers of Panama and other places on the coast of America. These heroes flourished long before I commenced my career, and if I have not equalled them in boldness and address, neither have I done so in cruelty and indiscriminate spoliation. My conscience acquits me of ever having committed any particular and distinct crime, although I have too often been leagued with the instigators and perpetrators of all kinds of atrocities. Know then, that I, and I alone, can point out the place where we deposited an immense treasure nearly twenty-three years ago, and it is to afford you the means of discovering and acquiring this, that I have called you here this night."

"You astonish me," cried Austin. "How can you be certain that the treasure still remains hidden? Is there no chance of any one having found and removed it?"

"No chance," returned Herkarl; "nay, not even a possibility; all who assisted in concealing it are dead, except myself. A buccaneer is bound by a terrible ceremony never to divulge secrets of this kind, while any of his associates remain alive. None of our fraternity ever yet dared to break his faith on such points. The penalty is too awful," continued he, shuddering. "The riches I speak of, were an accumulation of the spoils of many years, and they were deposited in security till a convenient time for dividing them should arrive. My companions in this transaction were sixteen in number. Thirteen perished by shipwreck soon afterwards; two were captured and executed, and the remaining individual died of fever on the coast of Cuba. The treasure lies in a small island very near the American shore. I have its position so accurately laid down, that it could be found without the slightest difficulty by a person in possession of the instructions, which it is in my power to give. Now, do you feel disposed to venture upon an expedition of the kind? You have abundant nautical knowledge, which will go far to insure your success; and

what is of equal importance, you understand the Spanish language; you need feel no scruples about the justness of your seizing and appropriating the treasure. It was, indeed, plunder; but no restitution can now be made; those who were robbed having long since paid the debt of nature. Besides, a great part of it consists of gold and silver utensils taken from Catholic churches."

"Your proposal is startling, but highly attractive," answered Austin. "It is equally suited to my circumstances and consonant to that spirit of adventure which has always animated me. But have you no desire to obtain the treasure for yourself? Is the island on which it is to be found uninhabited?"

"Of what value would riches be to me," replied Herkarl; "besides, these would prove unhallowed in my possession. I have sufficient to support me in a moderate way, and I desire no more. The island had no people upon it when I was last there, nor is it a spot likely to be selected as a place of residence by any one. But as you are probably not acquainted with the customs of the buccaneers, I will describe the cere-

monies which attended the secreting of this treasure.

"It was evening, when our schooner, rich with the spoils of many successful plundering expeditions, anchored off the island, which had, on many former occasions, been employed as a depôt for the more cumbrous parts of our booties. About midnight we got into our boat, and rowed ashore. A blood-red moon, dilated into terrific magnitude by a foggy atmosphere, was within a short time of setting, overhung by one immense black cloud, the lower edge of which was gradually descending like a curtain to the surface of the sea. The island, though within half a mile of us, was distinguishable only as a dark mass on the water. A death-like calmness prevailed around us, both in the air and on the ocean, upon whose waveless breast the reflection of a star sometimes glimmered feebly for a few moments, and seemed to be absorbed by the dense waters. The highest part of the island was crowned with some lofty palms, and these were sometimes suddenly and violently agitated, while a moaning wind could be heard careering among the other trees and the tangled brushwood

growing beneath them. We plied our oars without speaking, and disembarked in a small rocky bay, and having loaded ourselves with the different articles of treasure, we followed an intricate path with caution and difficulty, the darkness being great, and lights not being deemed admissible at this period of our proceedings. This was the first adventure of the kind in which I had ever been engaged, but my attention was less attracted by the obstructions in our route, than by the condition of an unhappy negro slave, who was dragged along, bound hand and foot, by two of our party. This wretch knew that he was about to be immolated, and that resistance or hope of rescue was equally vain. A bandage over his mouth prevented his speaking, but the shuddering of his convulsed frame could be distinctly heard by every one of us. My agitation was nearly as great as his own, and, full of horror and disgust at the atrocity of which I was unwillingly about to be a witness, I cursed the hour that I had ever joined my comrades, and determined thenceforth to renounce all connexion with them.

"On reaching the place of deposit, which

was embowered by trees, we all lighted our dark lanterns. We then opened the cavity intended for the concealment of our wealth, and found that it already contained a large amount in piastres and silver plate. Without removing any of either we added what we had brought, and carefully closed every thing up. A circle was now drawn round the spot, and we all took our places within its circumference, except two individuals, who, seizing the negro slave already mentioned, pierced with a dagger one of the arteries near his shoulder, and then led him slowly round the circle, in order that its boundary might be defined by the blood which fell freely from his wound. This being effected, the victim was placed upon the summit of the little mound which contained our wealth, and killed, by the stroke of an axe upon his skull. We then turned the faces of our dark lanterns towards the spot where he lay, and saw him expire. Having covered his body with large stones and rubbish, we extinguished our lights, and hurriedly descended to the beach, and pushed off towards the schooner without delay.

"The purpose of this shocking, and I believe

often practised ceremony, is to secure the concealed treasure from individual spoliation. Were any buccaneer, who had been present on an occasion of the kind, either to attempt to subtract any of the property, or to inform another where it was deposited, the spirit of the murdered party would punish him, either by destroying him upon the spot, or by haunting and harassing him in the most fearful way."

"You have told a hideous story," said Austin; "but is it not an inconsistency to suppose that the spirit of a murdered person would exert itself for the benefit of those who caused its death? Do you believe that any treacherous buccaneer ever became the victim of the penalties which you describe?"

"Buccaneers are seldom guilty of a breach of faith," replied Herkarl, gravely. "The bounds and grounds of one's belief in matters of this kind, cannot always easily be defined. But neither you nor I have any thing to fear, all my associates in the transaction being, as I have already mentioned, dead. The island lies in about 17° north latitude, and within Alhambra Bay, which is very well known to most of the inhabitants of

that coast, though of too insignificant dimensions to be laid down in the generality of maps or charts. I have here a plan of the whole. The bearings of the spot where the treasure lies, from different remarkable and unchanging objects, are given with such accuracy, that no mistake can be made; but still, the execution of the enterprise will require considerable courage and address. Your plan will be to sail from London to Vera Cruz, or any other convenient port in America. On arriving there, I would recommend that you should engage a small vessel and crew, and proceed to the island without delay. But the utmost caution will be requisite in the choice of those who are to assist you in removing the gold and silver, for assistance you must have; at all events let them not be Europeans, for the avarice that is peculiar to our species, would make them unite in plundering you. Employ negroes, or Indians, either of whom will prove faithful and obedient; but as priority of knowledge entitles to priority of possession, do not fear to use the sword and pistol, should any one discover your purpose and attempt to oppose it. I now put into your hands all the necessary

charts and papers, and may Heaven enable you to make a prosperous and a profitable use of them."

Austin received the documents with joy and gratitude, and after some further conversation, left Herkarl, and hastened homewards. His mind was in a tumult of agitation. A world of brilliant prospects had suddenly been opened to his view, and the enterprise which he had undertaken was so captivating in its nature, and of so new and interesting a character, that he felt that he would have been delighted to engage in it even for the benefit of another person. On coming in sight of his house, he could not help surveying it with contempt, and wondering how he had submitted so quietly to the dull and pleasureless life which he had passed within its walls. His first business was to deposit, in a safe place, the papers received from Herkarl. He then began to consider how he could best raise funds to answer the expense of the voyage to North America, and the arrangements that would be necessary after his arrival there. The pecuniary difficulties which he anticipated rather depressed his spirits, and sometimes a transient

doubt of Herkarl's veracity would flit across his mind. But when he considered that the old buccaneer could have no object in deceiving him, and recollected the consistency of his declarations respecting the situation of the treasure, and examined the charts and drawings, which evidently had been executed by an experienced navigator, all his uneasy suspicions vanished, and he determined to risk every thing in pursuit of the golden prize. To sell his village property without delay was absolutely necessary, and to prevent troublesome inquiries as to his reason for so doing, he resolved to state, that having some hopes of being put upon full pay and active service, he found it advisable to proceed to London to push his interest personally.

Next morning he set out for a town, ten miles distant, where an attorney lived, who speculated a good deal in purchasing small properties, when their distressed owners happened to be obliged to sell them, for about half their real value. In the course of a week, Austin transferred his patrimonial domain into this gentleman's possession, and received two hundred and fifty pounds for it. This sum, with a few months' arrears

of half pay, would, he conceived, be amply sufficient to enable him to accomplish his purpose; and the lawyer and he separated, mutually satisfied with the bargain.

Austin now visited Herkarl for the last time, and informed him of the arrangements which he had made. The old man expressed his approval and satisfaction, and said, "Let me advise you to hurry to London, and commence your voyage as soon as possible. Write to me before you embark, and I will inform you where I may be found, should I live till you return, which seems rather doubtful. As I bid you farewell, my excited spirit almost stirs me into a desire of accompanying you; but no, it must not be. It is time that my wanderings should cease for ever."

Austin took an affecting leave of the old man, and then went to offer his parting respects to Father Domont, and on the following morning at dawn, set out alone on his route to London.

CHAPTER II.

NOTHING remarkable occurred in the course of Austin's journey. Although he had immense wealth in prospective, he determined to practise the most rigid economy till he had obtained possession of it, fearful lest his means should prove hardly adequate to the proposed end. He therefore engaged lodgings in an obscure part of London, and while viewing the paltriness and narrowness of his accommodations, contrasted them, in imagination, with the elegance and splendour of those which he hoped to be able to command on his return from America. The possession of the buccaneer's golden secret raised him to a degree of importance in his own eyes, which sometimes affected his external behaviour so as to excite the attention of those around him, and his host and hostess, not having a key to what was passing in his mind, were occasionally at a loss how to reconcile his air of fearless self-complacency

and confident anticipation, with the circumstances and prospects of a half-pay lieutenant of the navy.

Austin's first business, after making his domestic arrangements, was to ascertain what vessels were bound for America, and he soon obtained intelligence of one about to sail for Vera Cruz, the port for which Mr. Herkarl had recommended that he should embark. Having engaged a passage in her, and procured bills upon a Spanish house of agency, and purchased some articles for his personal equipment, he found himself in readiness to depart, and a few days afterwards had the satisfaction of getting under weigh and sailing down the Thames. Previous to his leaving London, Herkarl had informed him by letter, that he had determined upon taking up his abode in a small town upon the coast of Sussex, where he should be found, or at least heard of, at any future time.

The vessel in which Austin now pursued his voyage to America, was about three hundred tons burthen, and her commander, Captain Trend, had all the good qualities that are de-

sirable in persons of his class, being an experienced seaman, a liberal host, and a rational companion. Austin was his only passenger, and they lived together in the utmost harmony, though the masters of merchant vessels are in general averse to having naval gentlemen on board their ships; the latter, under such circumstances, being apt to affect superior nautical knowledge, and offer their interference and advice, when both are equally unnecessary and uncalled for. But Austin had too much sense to do any thing of the kind, and never attempted to bring his professional skill into comparison, or collision, with that of Captain Trend. Indeed, his mind was so much engaged in pleasing anticipation, and in forming plans for the future, that he led a very passive sort of life, and felt little interest in any thing that was going on around him. Night after night he paced the deck, wrapt in thought, and building castles in the air. Many beautiful beings, whom he had seen and worshipped in former years, presented themselves in the midst of his visions, and seemed to smile upon him, and to say, that Fortune would

soon enable him to aspire to the love and eventual possession of one of them. In his intercourse with Captain Trend, he took every opportunity of acquiring such information respecting Vera Cruz, and the neighbouring coast and country, as he thought might prove useful to him; but in doing so his caution was extreme, lest the object of his voyage should be suspected or divined. The improbability of this never once occurred to him, for the possession of the buccaneer's secret occupied his mind so completely, that he fancied that it must be almost palpable to every one that he was the depositary of something of the kind.

They had completed nearly two thirds of the passage to Vera Cruz when they encountered a violent gale of wind, which commenced in the middle of the night, and continued till noon the following day. Though the vessel had suffered no damage, both Austin and her commander were much pleased when the weather grew moderate, as the navigation was now becoming somewhat intricate and dangerous. In the evening a total calm prevailed, and the ocean lost its former turbulence; but at long and irregular intervals, im-

mense masses of its waters were elevated into a mountainous swell, which first appeared undulating near the horizon, and gradually rolled onwards, increasing in height and magnitude, till it approached the ship, and raised it on its lofty ridge far above the level of the surrounding sea. The sky was still lurid with fragments of clouds, which bore little affinity to each other, either in density, form, or colour, and seemed to have been torn, dispersed, and thrown into confusion by the tempest of the preceding night. The horizon, though clear, was of a leaden hue, and the newly risen sun appeared contracted in dimensions, and shed a cold and brassy light upon the ocean. The weather-beaten ship, with double reefed sails and topmasts struck, formed a melancholy and consistent addition to the scene, which, however, was soon to become more interesting in its character than either Captain Trend, or his passenger, anticipated.

About half an hour after sunrise the boatswain gave notice that he saw a wreck about a league to leeward. The use of a telescope soon confirmed this, and showed the hull of a dismasted brig, floating as if water-logged and

abandoned by her crew. Captain Trend gave orders that a boat should immediately be lowered, and asked Austin if he felt inclined to accompany him to the wreck. The latter gladly assented, not only on account of his interest being excited, but because he thought it probable that his nautical habits and knowledge might enable him to be of considerable use upon the occasion.

On approaching the brig, they found that they were mistaken in supposing that she had been deserted by her people, for several Spanish seamen hailed their arrival with gestures of delight, and entreated them to come quickly on board. Austin's acquaintance with the Spanish language was now most usefully available, and he soon learned that the vessel was bound for Vera Cruz, and having been dismasted during the gale of the preceding night, was now in a sinking state from leakage, and the choking up of the pumps. Several of the crew had been washed overboard by a sea, and the master, and those that remained, were so weak from exertion that they had given up all hopes of being able to save themselves: and they now wished to abandon

their brig, and be received into the English ship, and landed at Vera Cruz. "We have two passengers in the cabin below," continued the Spaniard, "a gentleman and his wife, who are anxiously awaiting the result of our conference; but as you understand our language, perhaps you had better have an interview with them."

Austin and Captain Trend now descended the gangway, and were introduced to Señor Aranillo and his lady. The former, who was an old man, lay in his cot, wrapped in a large cloak, and seemed to be almost paralysed with fear; but on the entrance of the two strangers he rose, and, having made a profound but affected obeisance, thus addressed them in Spanish;—"Gentlemen, I am rejoiced to see you, for I can perceive by your countenances, that you have come here for the noble purpose of relieving the distressed. I cannot doubt that you will consent to receive myself, my wife, and the persons of subordinate condition belonging to this vessel, on board your own ship. Believe me, you will have no reason to repent of such an act of kindness. My circumstances and my station in society will alike enable me to reward you, though at present

neither of these can be apparent to you. While on a voyage, one is obliged to throw aside those attributes, and to dispense with those external forms and ceremonies, which indicate rank and the possession of wealth."

"Enough, enough," interrupted the lady with an expression of impatience, akin to contempt; "these gentlemen have, I am confident, too much natural generosity to be respecters of persons in a case like ours. Be our station high or low, they will equally assist us. The vessel is in a sinking state, and we therefore have no time for orations."

Señor Aranillo, casting upon her a look of reproach and displeasure, resumed his speech; "You will pardon the precipitate expressions uttered by this lady. Under circumstances of danger, the female mind is apt to be carried away by the acuteness of its feelings. I am well aware that, to persons of a superior grade, such as you appear to be, the idea of receiving as equals those with whom they have no acquaintance, is an unpleasant one, but rest assured that my pretensions—"

"Nine feet water in the hold!" cried one of

the Spanish seamen, which was immediately re-echoed by the British ones who had accompanied Captain Trend. The deck now became a scene of confusion, for the brig began to settle down in the water; and as two of her boats had been washed away, the remaining one, and that belonging to Captain Trend, were scarcely sufficient to contain the whole of the people. Austin called Señor Aranillo to hurry up stairs without ceremony, and took charge of the lady himself; putting her safely into the boat, and telling her that her property would be saved afterwards, should the brig continue above water long enough to admit of this being done.

Captain Trend had made a signal for another boat from his own ship, and this was now seen fast approaching. Austin resolved to wait for it in company with several men who had not found room in those which had just left the wreck, and in the mean time he hastened down to the cabin, which had been occupied by Señor Aranillo and his lady, collected together their property, and brought it upon deck. This was an office of such danger, that no one would assist him in it except a negro, who was either animated by

Austin's perseverance or insensible of the peril of his situation; for had the brig foundered while they were below, they must have gone to the bottom with her.

On the arrival of the ship's boat, every one was so anxious to quit the brig, that Austin could hardly prevail upon them to allow time to embark the trunks and packages which he had taken such trouble to save. This being at length accomplished, they all leaped into the boat, not without danger, and had rowed off a little way, before they discovered that the negro above mentioned was left behind. Indeed, he was the first to give notice of this, by calling out most piteously for them to return, which was strongly objected to by all the party except Austin, the brig being on the point of sinking, and of course liable to upset the boat by the whirlpool which she would occasion in her descent. But the negro could not swim, and he must have been abandoned, had not Austin declared that he would leap into the water himself, and endeavour to drag the unfortunate man on board, unless they consented to approach the vessel again, and rescue him. This had the de-

sired effect: the Spaniards rowed back to the wreck, and picked off Banno, whose delay between decks had arisen from his generous desire to save the property of one of the seamen to whom he was much attached.

Austin, on reaching the ship, found that Señor Aranillo and his lady had taken possession of his cabin, in compliance with the earnest request to that effect which he had made while assisting the latter into the boat. Captain Trend had also shut himself up after the fatigues of the morning, and Austin having changed his clothes, which were drenched with sea-water, and breakfasted, retired to a small apartment near the mainmast, which Captain Trend had directed to be cleared out and got ready to receive him. Here, while musing upon the events of the morning, he was visited by Banno, the negro, who came to offer his acknowledgments for his interference in preventing the Spanish seamen from abandoning him to his fate, when left upon the wreck. His gratitude was eloquent and animated, and after its first effusions, Austin questioned him respecting his voyage, and the Spanish lady and gentleman; but all the information that he could

give concerning the latter was, that they had sailed from Old Spain, and were bound to Vera Cruz, where he believed they usually resided.

The weather had now become serene, and the wind gentle and favourable. Shortly before dinner, Señor Aranillo and his wife appeared upon the quarter deck, and having in the morning been put in possession of their wardrobe, which had been saved by the exertions of Austin, they had devoted some time to the duties of the toilette. The lady looked particularly charming. She seemed about twenty-two years old, and her figure was elegant, though inclining a little to that *embonpoint* so common to Spanish women even during the bloom of youth. Her complexion was dark, but brightened by a healthful transparency, and her features were small and delicate, with the exception of the eyes, which exhibited that mixed expression of languor and vivacity, which is observable in the females of tropical countries alone. She wore a dress of white muslin, simple in form, but gracefully arranged, and had a few artificial flowers in her hair. Her other ornaments were rich gold-ear-

rings, a gold necklace, and bracelets of the same material. But the most striking part of her costume was the *manta*, a garb peculiar to Peruvian ladies. It consists of a large wide hood usually of silk, the lower part of which is fastened round the waist, while the upper one is drawn over the head, and its edges held by the hand in front, so as either partially or entirely to conceal the face of the wearer, as she may be inclined. At other times, the *manta* is allowed to drop negligently upon the shoulders, or even to fall below them, the end of it being then folded round the arm in the style of a shawl. Señora Aranillo wore the *manta* in this manner on first coming upon deck, but feeling the breeze a little cold, she soon drew the crimson silk over her head, and held it together under her chin. The succession of contrasts afforded by her softly swelling cheek, her dark eyes, her smooth white forehead, her richly curled brown hair, the flowers and green leaves that were wreathed in it, and the folds of bright crimson silk which crowned the whole, were so apposite and exquisite, that Austin gazed upon her with an inten-

sity of admiration that attracted her notice, and induced her to veil her countenance as much as possible from observation.

Her husband had evidently taken great pains to decorate his own person, although he appeared to be sixty years old, and was far from being handsome either in figure or face. His countenance was thin, and of a dark copper hue, expressive of an impatient and irritable temper, and he was of low stature; although he studied to render this less apparent, by affecting a dignity of demeanour. He wore a long skirted coat made of yellow silk with pink stripes, an embroidered waistcoat, and buckles in his shoes, and at his knees. He used two pocket handkerchiefs, a large and a small one, the latter being highly perfumed; and carried a *chapeau bras* with gold tassels under his arm, and in his right hand a cane, with which he forcibly struck the deck at every step he took.

Austin would have found it difficult to understand how a man so old, unprepossessing, and absurd, should have become the husband of a lady so attractive as the señora, had not his knowledge of the customs and character of the

Spaniards, taught him that marriages of so unsuitable a kind were of daily occurrence amongst them. Señor Aranillo, immediately on perceiving Austin, requested Captain Trend to introduce him, which was done in due form. The señor then presented Austin to his lady, saying that she felt the obligations which he had conferred upon them in saving their property, and assisting them to leave the wreck, as strongly as he himself did, but that the duty of expressing a due sense of these civilities devolved upon him, because his greater knowledge of the world, self-possession, and command of language, afforded him a better chance of accomplishing the purpose with propriety and effect. Austin entertained strong doubts of the correctness of his last assertion, and the lady seemed to do so likewise; for something between a smile and a frown played upon her countenance as long as her husband continued to speak.

These ceremonies being concluded, dinner was announced, and the party descended to the cabin, and placed themselves at table. Captain Trend not understanding Spanish, Austin was obliged to perform the office of interpreter between him

and Señor Aranillo; and this proved a rather arduous task when the latter happened to be the spokesman, for he had no idea of easy unaffected conversation, every thing he said assuming the form of a studied oration, delivered at intervals of nearly a quarter of an hour, and including his remarks upon all that had been uttered by the company within the same space of time. When dinner was over, the lady retired; and the señor then drew from his pocket a chased silver box of an oblong form, and opening it, took out some very small cigars, formed of powdered Havannah tobacco, inclosed in tubes of fine paper, and presented one to each of his companions. He smoked and sipped strong coffee for about half an hour, and then went to his cabin to take a siesta.

Under the influence of favouring winds, the ship now rapidly neared her port. Austin had daily opportunities of enjoying the society of Señora Aranillo, and he found her to be as attractive in manners as in person. She was imaginative, ingenuous, and high-spirited; all of which qualities found ready sympathy in the breast of Austin, who was flattered by the

pleasure she evidently took in his company, and the undisguised manner in which she sought opportunities of conversing with him. She expressed her feelings in the most unreserved manner, and Austin easily perceived that she did not think herself particularly happy in being wedded to Señor Aranillo, and that her fancy loved to dwell upon scenes different from any that she had hitherto experienced, or that were likely to be realized to her by the future.

At length the coast of Mexico, surmounted by the towering peak of Orizaba appeared in view, and two or three days more promised to bring the voyage to a termination. Austin and Señora Aranillo stood upon deck contemplating the scene by moonlight.

"This prospect, independently of its grandeur," said the former, "must be a pleasing one to you. The land before us is, I believe, your native one."

"I was born in Lima," returned Eugenia; "but have spent the latter years of my life chiefly in Mexico. In one sense I rejoice again to behold its shores; but the truth is, that I myself have changed so much since I last left them,

that I fear I shall never again regard them with that serene satisfaction which they, and every thing they contain, once afforded me."

"Alas!" returned Austin, "how often does it happen, that in residing for a time in foreign countries, our affection for our own becomes weakened. But does the cause of this lie within yourself, or has it arisen from the circumstances in which you happened to be placed?"

"From the latter, I believe," said Eugenia. "I have seen too much of the great and brilliant world, to be satisfied with the narrow sphere of Vera Cruz, where the señor and myself are about to reside. I was educated in Peru, and passed my life there till my marriage, when I removed to Mexico, which is my husband's native place. The change was not a disagreeable one; the state of society in the two countries being very much upon a par in point of intelligence and refinement. Consequently I found myself happy enough at Vera Cruz, and had spent about a year there, when Señor Aranillo received intelligence that he had become heir to a title and estate in Old Spain, from whence his parents originally

emigrated. Anxious to prosecute and establish his claims, he determined to make a voyage to the land of his ancestors, and we accordingly sailed for Lisbon, and hastened from thence to Madrid. There his connexions introduced us to the best and highest society, and I led a life of pleasure and gaiety and fashionable dissipation, for several months. From Madrid we removed to Paris, where we were equally well received, and kindly treated, and after travelling through a considerable part of France, crossed the Pyrenees, and returned to the capital of Spain. Señor Aranillo did not succeed in establishing his claim to the title, but he obtained possession of a considerable property, and every thing connected with it soon being arranged, we prepared to embark for Vera Cruz. The idea of returning to it was painful even then, and I tried to persuade the señor to settle in Europe; but he would not consent to this, because we enjoyed no rank or personal honours. I recalled to him, that we had found no want of these while in Madrid, but he was inexorable: and we accordingly sailed in the Spanish brig, from which, when it

had become a wreck, we experienced so providential a rescue through your own exertions and those of Captain Trend."

"I can easily sympathise with you," returned Austin. "In feeling dissatisfied with your present prospects, you merely do justice to yourself. You are formed to add lustre and attraction to the most refined circles. I have been in American society, both male and female, but never met with an individual of either sex that had the slightest pretension to claim kindred with a being like yourself."

"You mistake me, señor," returned Eugenia, colouring; "the good, the wise, and the learned, abound in Mexico. But my countrymen and countrywomen are a simple, untutored race. They have hitherto made little progress in what may be termed the art of living. Had I never seen the European world, I might enjoy contentment and happiness amongst them, but I have acquired new tastes and predilections, in which they can neither participate nor sympathize. The common routine of life pursued by the ladies of Mexico is insipid and contemptible.

Their morning visits to each other, and the trifling conversation that takes place in the course of them; the dinner in the middle of the day, and the stupifying *siesta* which succeeds it; the evening drive on the *Alameda*, or attendance at the *Plaza* to see a bull-fight, and the still coarser festivities of the *Intrudo*, will not gratify me now; my own sex will see that I despise them and their amusements, and our intercourse will become constrained, heartless, and distrustful."

"This may prove true," replied Austin, "but still your own accomplishments will afford you resources which neither can be destroyed nor affected by external circumstances. At your delightful country residence near Xalapa, described to me by the señor, you will pass your days in happy seclusion, independent of the world, and indifferent to its scenes of gaiety."

"A life of solitude never was my choice," said Eugenia; "a woman's heart and affections must have play, otherwise she is nothing. I have learned to love, esteem, and admire characters of a kind which I do not expect to meet with

in Mexico. No, no; my countrymen and countrywomen are lively, generous, and often noble in their natures, but they are not susceptible of those refined pleasures which spring from the collision of highly cultivated minds. The Mexican ladies are charming in the dance, and in the commonplace intercourse of daily life; but their attractions are altogether external and superficial. Beware, señor, lest your heart should be captivated by one of these sirens. She would, indeed, return your love, but not with that strength which would satisfy you, and with which, allow me to say it, you ought to be loved by her upon whom you have fixed your affections."

"Lady," replied Austin, "your opinion raises me in my own estimation; but I believe that my acquaintance with yourself will prove a more effectual countercharm to my loving any of your countrywomen, than the utmost caution on my part ever could do. When my admiration begins to be excited by female attractions, the remembrance of you will make me feel that I am about to bestow it on an inferior and a comparatively unworthy object."

"No more of this," cried the señora; "when we arrive at Vera Cruz you must become our guest; and I feel confident that my husband will be delighted to aid you in your pursuits, whatever they may be. The Spaniards and English associate little together in Mexico, but the obligations which you have laid us under will make you an exception to this, both as concerns ourselves and our friends. Good night."

During the last few days Austin had been so much interested by Señora Aranillo, and had spent so much time in her society, that the grand purpose of his voyage had almost vanished from his memory. But now, with the shores of Mexico in sight, he began to perceive the necessity of planning its execution, which would prove the more difficult and doubtful in its result the longer it was delayed, because an inactive residence in Vera Cruz or its neighbourhood, had every chance of drawing upon him the attention and scrutiny of its jealous inhabitants. To Captain Trend and Señor Aranillo he had stated that his object in visiting South America was to obtain a tract of land, on which he might settle and cultivate the mercantile productions of the

country; for he perceived that under the ostensible prosecution of this design, he might examine the coasts without awakening any curiosity respecting his motives in doing so.

CHAPTER III.

One morning at sunrise Austin found the ship at anchor between the Isle of Sacrifices and the continent of America, and saw the white domes and regular buildings of Vera Cruz in the distance. The vessel was worked into the harbour in the course of the day, and he landed, in company with Captain Trend and Señor Aranillo and his wife, shortly before sunset. The two latter proceeded to the house of a friend, and Austin, having promised to call upon them next morning, took up his abode in the hotel. Banno, the negro, had shewn such an interest in his concerns, and such attention to his personal comfort while on board ship, that he was happy to engage him as a servant, anticipating the time when he would require the assistance of some one on whose affection and fidelity he could confidently rely. It being the unhealthy season at Vera Cruz, the town was deserted by a large

proportion of its usual residents of the better class, most of whom had taken refuge in their country houses in the neighbourhood of the town of Xalapa, which is sixty miles from Vera Cruz. But this was a matter of little interest to Austin, whose object of pursuit was too absorbing, from its nature and importance, to admit of his either seeking amusement in the city, or wishing to cultivate the society of its inhabitants.

On visiting Señor Aranillo and his lady next day, he found them both in a state of alarm and anxiety, in consequence of the former having already shewn some symptoms of the prevailing fever of Vera Cruz. His medical advisers had recommended that he should be removed into the country without delay, and the señora was engaged in making preparations for their journey, which they were to begin that afternoon. The señor seemed very uneasy about his situation, though his disease did not appear to be dangerous in its character. "Now, my friend," said he, seizing Austin's hand, "let me entreat you to accompany us to my residence called Velasca. Perhaps the request is a selfish one, for I am a poor invalid, at present incapable of con-

tributing to your amusements or ministering to your comfort; but here is a lady who requires that protection which I cannot easily give her, and which she will have at least an equal pleasure in receiving from you. You must not refuse me."

Austin was affected, and though he had often laughed internally at the señor's peculiarities, he could not help now regarding him with sympathy and respect. "You may command my services," said Austin; "though without experience of the mode of travelling in this country, I shall manage to be of some use I hope, and I have an arm for the protection of a lady in any climate." He now directed Banno to make the necessary preparations for a journey into the interior, and returning to the posada, sent for his baggage from on board ship, and purchased a horse from the landlord, and rejoined his friends early in the afternoon. The idea of proceeding to Velasca was not a disagreeable one to Austin, though the excursion threatened to interfere considerably with the speedy execution of his plans; but he consoled himself by reflecting that it would afford him an opportunity of acquiring

some knowledge of the people and the country, and also increase his familiarity with the language, all of which advantages were likely to prove of essential importance to him.

The party left Vera Cruz a short time before sunset, intending to take advantage of the moonlight evening, and pursue their journey during its coolness. Señor Aranillo and his lady sat in a carriage drawn by mules, and Austin rode on horseback beside it. On quitting the city, they began to traverse a desolate sandy plain, destitute of vegetation, excepting in a few scattered spots, where the hardy euphorbium reared its prickly and knotted stem a little way above the soil. The sides of the road occasionally presented heaps of whitened bones, which were the remains of horses and cattle that had perished from time to time from hunger or fatigue. As the night advanced, a haziness arose from the surface of the plain, and extended on every side towards the horizon, assuming the appearance of an expanse of water. The silence was broken only by the travellers themselves, and the surrounding waste exhibited no moving ob-

ject, except when a fire-fly rose from the ground and darted away like a shooting star.

At night they reached a village, and took shelter in its posada, or public shed for the accommodation of travellers. Señor Aranillo, though fatigued by his journey, seemed also to have derived benefit from it, and was cheerful and animated with hopes of a speedy recovery. After supper, the materials of which had been brought from Vera Cruz, the posada affording nothing of the kind, the party took some repose on such beds as could be provided. On the succeeding day the travellers went twenty-five miles further, and on reaching the town where they were to spend the night, it was found that Señor Aranillo had become much worse. His debility was so great that he scarcely could speak, and he declared that he felt himself dying. No medical assistance being obtainable, the most simple and obvious remedies alone were administered by his lady, who nursed him with the utmost tenderness and assiduity.

Austin remained by the señor's couch for a considerable part of the night, but was at last

prevailed upon by Eugenia to seek a little repose. This however soon was interrupted by a servant, who awakened him and hurriedly announced that his master had just expired. Austin hastened to the señor's bed-side, and found this to be true. The señora's grief was neither passionate nor obtrusive, but as deep and sincere as a young woman could be expected to feel for the loss of a man three times her own age, and of uncongenial, though in some respects generous and amiable dispositions.

Velasca, the country residence of the deceased Señor Aranillo, being only ten miles distant, it was determined that his remains should be carried there for interment; and Austin, at the request of his widow, proceeded to give directions to that effect, and to send an intimation of what had occurred, to Señora Marenta, a female friend of hers, who lived in the neighbourhood, entreating that she would set out for Velasca without delay, and there make preparations for the funeral.

Austin now resolved that after he had seen Señora Aranillo settled in security at Velasca, and attended the obsequies of her husband, he should immediately return to Vera Cruz, and

devote himself to his own affairs. The party reached Velasca the succeeding day, and the funeral took place in the evening; the rites being performed by a priest who resided in the neighbourhood. At their conclusion, Señora Aranillo retired to her private apartment, and Austin was left in the society of her female friend.

Señora Marenta was about thirty-five years old, stout in person, and of an active and lively disposition. Her countenance wore that expression of unalterable composure which indicates a familiarity with all kinds of scenes, whether of a gay or a sorrowful character, and shews that the individual has been accustomed to render herself useful, by undertaking the daily duties of life for those whom circumstances of difficulty or affliction have rendered for a time incapable of properly attending to such. She was quite at home in her friend's mansion, and gave directions to the servants, regulated the table, and examined every apartment in the house. These things occupied the morning, and having accomplished them, she seated herself beside Austin, and entered into conversation with him, occasionally alluding to Señora Aranillo, but in ge-

neral dilating upon some frivolous and local subject. They dined together *tête à tête*, and Señora Marenta, having ate and drank heartily, smoked a small cigar, and then throwing herself upon a sofa, composed herself for the enjoyment of the afternoon slumber.

Austin had not yet been long enough in America to have acquired this habit, and instead of following the lady's example, he strolled into a garden belonging to the mansion, and seating himself in the shade, remained stationary till near sunset. On wandering forth from his retirement, he met Señora Aranillo, who had just left her chamber to enjoy the open air. She wore a dress of black silk, and over the whole was thrown a very large black crape scarf, the upper part of it covering her head and a portion of her face. They saluted each other, and walked together for some moments in silence.

"Things have sadly changed their aspect since we landed at Vera Cruz," said she. "Then I hoped, in conjunction with my husband, to have cultivated your friendship here, and afforded you that assistance and those good offices which all strangers require on their arrival in a

foreign country, whatever their purposes and pursuits may be."

"Lady," returned Austin, "I thank you for all the favours I have received from you, as well as for those which you and your late husband intended to confer. But as circumstances stand at present, I ought to endeavour to be of some use or benefit to yourself, although I fear that my isolated and unfriended condition will render any efforts of this kind of little avail. Does it lie within the bounds of my power to serve you? It is my intention to depart for Vera Cruz to-morrow, unless your commands or interests should lead me in another direction."

"What! to-morrow," exclaimed the señora, "so soon indeed! There is no reason that you should hurry from Velasca, because it is now without a master. What would you do at Vera Cruz? You tell me that you propose to purchase an estate in this country, and settle upon it. You surely do not expect to find one near a sea-port town, or within the confines of its surrounding deserts. Vera Cruz is the abode of pestilence, and has proved the grave of innumerable Europeans, and of Englishmen in parti-

cular. It is here, it is in this neighbourhood of fruitfulness and luxuriance, that you may expect to obtain what you want. Remain then yet a little, lest you should have reason to repent your precipitation."

Austin was confused, and felt at a loss what to reply. He perceived that the false pretext which he had given for his visiting Mexico, had already led him into a snare, and was likely to do so again. His first impulse was to disclose the secret to the señora; but a moment's consideration determined him against this; not that he doubted but she would faithfully keep it, but he disliked the idea of putting any one in possession of a power, by means of which his freedom of action might be affected, and the train of his fortunes altered and involved.

"I am not insensible to the value of your hospitality," replied Austin, "and feel in no small degree flattered that you should desire more of my society. But circumstances, which I am not at liberty to explain, compel me to adhere to my first resolution. Surely, you do not mean that the termination of our acquaintance must be the consequence of my departing hence to-morrow. What is there to prevent our renewing it,

and soon too, and also under more favourable and happy auspices than at present? I should be ungrateful, indeed, were I ever to forget the first and only friend I have made on this side of the Atlantic."

At this moment Señora Marenta advanced and joined them, and having learned from Banno that his master proposed to leave Velasca next morning, she endeavoured to dissuade Austin from doing so, telling him that there would soon be a bull-fight in the nearest village, and that three saints' festivals were about to be celebrated with great splendour. Her volubility upon these subjects was so great, that Austin found no opportunity of having any further conversation with Señora Aranillo, and he bade her good night, assuring her that he would remain at Velasca one more day.

Austin, on going to bed, felt chilly and unwell; but his mind being engaged with the occurrences of the day, he paid little regard to these sensations. In the morning he was affected with high fever, and all the accompanying symptoms of the violent disease that prevails on the coast of America. Banno immediately informed Señora Marenta of his master's illness,

and that lady hastened to his bedside, and endeavoured to administer relief both to his soul and his body. But in the mean time, wisely distrusting her own skill, she had sent to Xalapa for a physician, who, however, did not arrive till evening, at which time Austin had become much worse.

Señora Aranillo had an interview with Doctor Salvadad, and after inquiring minutely into the state of his patient, insisted that he should remain all night at Velasca, promising that her own carriage should be ready in the morning to convey him back to Xalapa. To this arrangement he readily assented, and sat up with Austin a considerable part of the night, so that with the additional attendance of Señora Marenta, he was tolerably well nursed, and his disease so successfully treated, that all the symptoms had declined in violence by noon the following day.

After a week he was convalescent, and the kind attentions of Señora Aranillo, the charming situation of Velasca, and the comforts and conveniences which it afforded him, soon re-established his health. He spent much time in the society of his hostess, whose fascinations evolved them-

selves in proportion as he became more intimate with their possessor. But Austin, though naturally susceptible, had not yet fallen in love with Eugenia. Much as she excited his admiration, she did not resemble that ideal of female perfection which his imagination had been in the habit of embodying for its own delight. The enchantments of a growing passion, therefore, did not occasion him to linger at Velasca, or forget the purpose for which he had visited the shores of Mexico; and his usual health and vigour being restored, he informed Señora Aranillo, with a degree of embarrassment, the cause of which he was unable to explain, that he intended to take leave of herself and Señora Marenta at an early period, at the same time expressing his gratitude for past kindnesses.

"Ah! señor," returned she, "are you still impatient to leave us? Well, well, go. Consult your own feelings, and do not suppose that I—that we, I mean,—wish to detain you. Truly your taste appears to be of an extraordinary kind. You desire to hasten to a pestilential city; to throw yourself among strangers; to seek for an estate;—a paradise I suppose,—for you are not

satisfied with Velasca. Yet let me tell you, sir, that my countrymen think this a charming spot. You are a foreigner, indeed, and an Englishman, and we Mexicans, as I formerly said, have few pretensions to refinement. It is alone to your being a stranger in the country, that you owe the attentions which you have received from me. Every thing shall be prepared for your departure to-morrow morning."

"Señora Aranillo," cried Austin, "hear me! You misapprehend my character. Yourself, your abode, and every thing around it, delight me more than I can express: but is that a reason that I should linger here in the lap of indolence and enjoyment, forgetting the purpose which I have undertaken, and basely shrinking from its performance? It is true that by remaining under your roof, I should be blest with every thing that the heart can desire except self-approbation, which to me is paramount over all. A longer stay at Velasca would, I am sure, sink me in your estimation as much as in my own."

"I admire your sentiments," returned the lady, with a kind smile, "though I am inclined to rebel against your acting up to them. But

tell me, señor, tell me sincerely, what is it that you really have in view? I am not to be deceived into the belief that your objects are what you profess them to be. You have no intention of purchasing an estate in this country. No, no; your silence confirms what I say. Will you not confide your secret to me, and at once satisfy my doubts? I have sometimes fancied that you are employed by the British Government, to obtain political information respecting Mexico, or to execute some diplomatic measure; but the more knowledge I acquire of your character, the less am I disposed to believe any thing of the kind. Alas! perhaps you have come upon an errand of love. And yet that can hardly be; at least, I hope not; for there, indeed—indeed—I could—could not, assist you."

"Your suspicions, señora, are not correct in either instance," returned Austin. "I am, indeed, an officer in the British navy, but have no other connection with government, direct or indirect. I must also disclaim the influence of love in bringing me to this country. The enterprize in which I am about to engage, is an honourable and unobjectionable one, but I dare not yet dis-

close its nature, scarcely being authorized to do so."

"But say is it perilous, and likely to prove of long duration?" inquired Señora Aranillo.

"Perilous to those only who may attempt to oppose its execution," answered Austin.

"Ah, there is a hint for me not to interfere," said the señora, laughing; "but, seriously, would not you deign to accept assistance from a lady, were such likely to be of any use to you?" She paused for a few moments, as if to collect resolution to say something of agitating interest; and then continued,—"Señor, do not be offended if I express my conviction that your present purpose, whatever it may be, is directed towards the acquirement of wealth. You may remember, you once told me that you were poor, and that the officers of the British navy always remained so, if they adhered to their profession. You speak with enthusiasm of your native country, and of its customs, religion, and people. Can I believe that you would voluntarily abandon all these advantages, except in the expectation of being able to secure the means of returning to them, and permanently enjoying them? These means now lie

within your reach, and can be obtained without danger. They are in my gift. I perceive you understand me. Yes, I love you, Austin Deller; but I would not make this declaration, did I suppose you to be wholly indifferent to me. Alas!" continued she, shedding a flood of tears, "I fear that my conduct will appear bold and indelicate. I know not the customs of your countrywomen, nor the forms of behaviour which they observe in affairs of this kind. But in this land, we are all heart, and speak our feelings when they are generous, without disguise. Though I am a widow, I offer you my first love. I was married against my inclination, to a man whose age, character, and tastes, equally formed a contrast to my own. But while he lived, I treated him with unblemished honour and respect, and now put no slight upon his memory by fixing my affections upon another and more congenial object. Do not answer me now. If I have been guilty of rashness, my sincerity must surely afford ample extenuation."

She started from the spot where they stood, and disappeared before Austin could give any reply. The communication which Eugenia had

made, agitated him not a little. His first emotions were pleasure and gratified vanity; but these soon subsided when he began to consider his situation in all its bearings, and he neither felt disposed to congratulate himself upon what had taken place, nor to turn it to his own advantage. He did not love Eugenia enough to wish to marry her, yet he loved her too well to be able for a moment to entertain the idea of making her unhappy. But he chiefly regretted that she possessed so much wealth, and had offered him the command of it all. It annoyed him to think, that having undertaken an enterprise for the purpose of enriching himself, and being on the eve of successfully executing it, Fortune had, by an extraordinary caprice, not only brought the desired object to his feet, but also in a manner made his acceptance of it appear as a boon to herself. The idea of easily and calmly entering into possession of the means of obtaining all the conveniences and pleasures of life, would have been a most agreeable one to him had he never heard of the existence of the buried treasure. But his mind had so long dwelt upon securing that, that all other wealth seemed to lose both value and attrac-

tion in his eyes. When he recalled the particulars communicated by Herkarl, planned in anticipation the necessary voyage down the coast, imagined himself inspecting and surveying the island, discovering the place of deposit, opening it in the dead of night, manœuvring how he could best conceal the value of its contents from his boat's crew, defending his right of possession, and finally returning in triumph to Vera Cruz, and having all the world before him and the means of wandering through it at will,—the whole formed such a fascinating scene of mystery, adventure, anxiety, circumspection, and even personal danger, as to charm him into the resolution of realising it all without further delay.

But what was to become of Eugenia? Was he to reject the offering which she had made of her heart? Worldly prudence whispered that he should not come to any decision upon the subject till he had visited the island, because if he failed in obtaining its concealed riches, he would do well to seek consolation for his disappointment in a union with Señora Aranillo: but Austin rejected this suggestion with contempt. His irresolution was of the most painful and per-

plexing kind, and a thousand times he wished that he could love Eugenia a little more or a little less, or that he had never met with her at all.

On looking from the window of his apartment, he saw the sun setting on the beautiful domain around him, and could not help exclaiming to himself, "All this might be mine, with its fairer and more valuable mistress. The bribe is a tempting one, but shall I take to my bosom a foreigner, who does not even understand my own language, and who would, perhaps, be unwilling to reside in my native country? No;—we must think no more of each other." He then sat down, and wrote the following letter to Señora Aranillo.

"The reasons for my departure which I expressed this morning, still continue in full force. Do not think me ungrateful for your love, but I have engaged in an enterprise which I should render myself contemptible by abandoning. You may well conceive it to be one of absorbing interest and importance, since it impels me to forsake the society of her who has so many claims to my affection and admiration. I am now a

poor friendless wanderer, and feel myself unworthy of your regard; but should success attend my purposes, I shall be able to appear in a different character, and to act with greater independence and sincerity than circumstances permit me to do at present."

He was aware that these words would prove very unsatisfactory to Eugenia, but he knew not what to say, and had once or twice almost determined to depart without attempting to give any explanation of his conduct. That night Banno, in obedience to orders previously given by his master, was in waiting with two saddled horses at a little distance from Velasca; and when it grew dark, Austin having sealed the note, and laid it upon a table in his apartment, stole from the house to the place of rendezvous, and mounting one horse, while Banno took his seat upon the other, galloped away towards Vera Cruz. His mind was far from being serene or self-satisfied. He could not perceive anything blameable in what he had done and was doing, but he knew that his departure would agitate and afflict Eugenia, and he felt disposed to accuse himself of hard heartedness and of a want of generosity,

in not consulting her happiness in place of yielding to the dictates of his own wayward inclination. "But I have not deserted her," thought he; "my absence will only put the strength and durability of her affection to the test, which is desirable for the sake of both of us. Should she love me as much as ever after my return from my expedition, I may then think of marrying her."

They reached Vera Cruz on the evening of the succeeding day, and went to one of the inferior posadas, as Austin wished to live as privately and obscurely as possible while making preparations for his expedition down the coast. His first business was to engage a person to receive into custody any packages which he might wish to land privately, and this he soon arranged, there being many petty agents in Vera Cruz who obtain a livelihood by smuggling ashore various articles which their owners wish to conceal from the custom-house officers.

Austin next made inquiries about a small sloop or schooner for his intended voyage, and soon obtained one on hire of a size and descrip-

tion suited to his purpose. He now thought proper to disclose his plans to Banno, whose conduct had satisfied him that he might be implicitly and safely confided in. The negro listened to the communication with astonishment and delight, and promised to risk his life, if necessary, in obtaining the treasure. Having received directions from Austin to collect a crew of negroes or Indians to navigate the sloop, he soon obtained the desired number of men, his knowledge of their haunts and language enabling him to execute his commission in the best and quickest manner. As Austin had only hired the vessel, her owner, who was a Chalco-Indian, necessarily made one of the party, but without being permitted to exercise any command over the others. Austin had purchased arms for himself in England, but in addition to these he had a box of muskets and cutlasses put on board, which he intended to distribute among his crew, should he find reason to trust in their fidelity. Having provided the requisite quantity of provisions and water, and examined the state of the sails and rigging, Austin desired Talaxa, the owner of the

sloop, to bring her to anchor in front of the castle of St. Juan de Ullua. Next morning at dawn, the former, accompanied by Banno, embarked and set sail for the southward.

CHAPTER IV.

The morning brightened serenely as Austin receded from Vera Cruz, and a calm sea and a favourable breeze enabled him soon to leave it far behind. He determined to stand out from the coast till he had made four leagues of offing, and then to run parallel with it one hundred and forty miles, which would bring him opposite to Alhambra Bay. At Vera Cruz, he had procured several modern charts of the coast of Mexico, and on now comparing these with the manuscript one given to him by Herkarl, he found, in their strict coincidence, a proof that the latter had been drawn by a skilful navigator, and probably from actual observation and personal survey. This inspired him with confidence, for it afforded a strong assurance, that the other plans and the sailing directions which accompanied them, would prove equally correct.

Herkarl's written instructions described the

island where the treasure was concealed to lie exactly in the bight of a small bay, and about two miles from the main shore. Across the front of the bay stretched Alhambra island, and the passage in, which was at its north end, land-locked the northern point of the continental shore, and appeared on a first view to be connected with the latter, so that a person ignorant of the particular navigation would have supposed that no bay existed there, or at least that its entrance was farther to the southward.

Austin continued under easy sail all day, but contented himself with standing off and on during the night, that he might have an opportunity of seeing with distinctness the whole outline of the coast between Vera Cruz and his place of destination. Next morning, the wind still continuing favourable, he pursued his way, and at noon took an observation for the latitude, which gave 17° 11′ N. This brought him within twenty-one miles of Alhambra island, and after running four leagues farther, and gradually closing in with the coast, he shortened sail, and began to look out for the land-marks which were described in his instructions as pointing out the

situation of the island and bay. This was an interesting occupation, and he felt extreme delight on its proving a successful one. Two round hammocks rising behind a red cliff, at length opened upon his view, and told him that he was opposite to the entrance of the bay.

It was now within two hours of sunset, and Austin found that he would just have time to get into the bay and drop anchor, while day-light lasted. He discovered the passage without difficulty, and steering in, moored safely behind Alhambra island, and about five furlongs from the smaller one, which contained, as he hoped, the object of his pursuit. Indeed, the soundings and the bearings of the neighbouring land satisfied him that he had taken nearly the same station that Herkarl's schooner had done, on that eventful night when the slave was sacrificed, and the treasures deposited under ground.

Austin having completed his nautical arrangements, began to survey the surrounding scene, which was of an equally beautiful and peculiar kind. The bay was nearly semicircular, and Alhambra island extended in front, across its whole diameter, and shut it out from the main

sea, no part of which was discernible from the deck of the sloop, except at the narrow passage through which she had entered. Between the bight of the bay and Alhambra island, lay the Pirates' Islet. It was about a mile long, and half as much in breadth, and was covered with luxuriant vegetation nearly to the water's edge. A smooth and sloping beach encircled the bay, and was variegated by corals and shells of the most brilliant hues and interesting kinds. On the north side was the mouth of a small river, on the banks of which grew immense trees, whose projecting boughs met together, and completely overshadowed its surface, except in one or two places where the rays of the sun found entrance, and blazed upon the deep, cool, transparent running stream beneath. The recess thus formed afforded a place of resort to innumerable bright winged birds, which were constantly hovering around its entrance, or darting out and in again, or diving under the water for food, or sportively skimming along its mirrored surface. Behind the beach the ground ascended gently, and presented scattered clumps of low trees, and a surface green with vegetation; but a little farther

back, the country rose into hills, which were covered from top to bottom with thick and apparently impenetrable forests.

Austin had never before seen so charming a spot, or one so totally shut out from the surrounding world. Nothing could exceed the deepness of its solitude; but the purity of the atmosphere, the calmness of the sea, and the luxuriance of the scenery, divested the place of all gloom or sombreness. It appeared not to have been visited by any human being since the occurrence of the transactions recorded by Herkarl.

Austin determined to land upon the Pirates' Islet and take a partial survey of it that evening, when the moon had risen. Indeed, he preferred making his first visit during the silence and obscurity of night, as he would then be better able to reconnoitre the place, and to satisfy himself that it was uninhabited, or at least not frequented by Indians from the main. He therefore directed that the sloop's boat should be in readiness, and having at the proper time embarked, with Banno and two of the crew, they rowed gently towards the island. On gaining its beach Austin leaped ashore, and desired his three at-

tendants to remain in the boat, and to continue in the same situation till he returned from his exploring excursion.

The full moon had now attained her greatest altitude in the heavens, and the night was one of astonishing grandeur. A congregated series of vast pyramidal-shaped clouds of a dense and dazzling whiteness, lay ranged in motionless repose along the whole circumference of the horizon. Their lofty summits, fantastic in outline, and well defined as those of an iceberg, stretched into the clear, soft, blue sky, without in the least degree amalgamating with it or losing that opaqueness which characterized their bases. A few stars could be discerned faintly twinkling as it were behind the shelter of their summits, the blaze of moonlight overpowering the sparkle of all those constellations whose position happened to be high in the zenith. Not the faintest streak nor the most shadowy fleece of cloud dimmed the expanse of sky over head; nor did a breath of wind shake a leaf of the surrounding forests. Austin had landed beneath a rocky pinnacle crowned with shrubbery, and he gained its summit with much labour, and descending its oppo-

site side, found himself upon level ground, and under the shadow of a grove of large trees. The appearance of the place indicated that he was near the spot where the treasure lay, and a feeling of mysterious awe stole over him when he remembered the sanguinary deed that had been committed there, and Herkarl's superstition respecting the interference of the spirit of the murdered slave, in the event of the wealth, for the guardianship of which he had been sacrificed, being plundered by unlawful hands. This island, thought Austin, belongs to him and me. Its solitude ensures my success, and fearless of interruption I shall execute my purpose in the course of to-morrow.

On advancing a little way he came to a spot which had the appearance of an inclosure. It was nearly circular, and was surrounded with a double row of small trees, between the trunks and lower branches of which, creeping plants extended, and formed a close and verdant screen. Through this a white object of considerable size was discernible, and Austin fancied that he heard a faint noise, like that of a person breathing heavily. His interest and curiosity were now

excited to the highest pitch, and he approached as close as possible to the fence, and looked through its interstices, but was still unable to discover the nature of the object within. He now walked cautiously around its circumference, and soon found an opening, about two yards in width. He was about to enter this, but the objects within startled him so much, that he remained fixed in motionless astonishment.

In front of the entrance of the inclosure stood a small wooden building, of a rude and simple construction, and fitted up as a Catholic chapel, having a cross raised at one end, and a little altar beneath. On the latter stood a lamp, and near it a female was kneeling, apparently in deep devotion, and sometimes uttering prayers in a faintly audible whisper. She was dressed in black silk, but in a negligent style, though not without elegance. Her figure was tall and well-proportioned, and her countenance wore an expression of melancholy, for which it was more remarkable than for the beauty or regularity of its features.

Austin, after his first emotion at the sight of these unexpected objects had subsided, began to consider what line of conduct he

ought to pursue, as respected his discovering himself to the lady, for he perceived that he still could easily make an unseen retreat; but when he reflected how important it might be to the success of his future plans that he should ascertain who she was that haunted the spot where he least of all wished to encounter a human being, and whether she resided on the island, and how many other inhabitants it had, he determined to seek an opportunity of accosting her, in a way that would occasion her as little alarm as possible; but at this moment she suddenly turned round, and seeing him before her, shrieked out, "Lamberto! Lamberto! is it your spirit that comes thus?" and immediately fell to the ground, in a swoon. Austin raised her in his arms, and addressed her, but she remained quite insensible, and after placing her upon the floor and lifting her up again several times without producing any symptoms of re-animation, he carried her into the open air, but with no better effect.

His situation had now become a most agitating one. Alone in a forest with an almost lifeless female, destitute of the means of recalling her senses, and ignorant where her friends were

to be found, he knew not what course to pursue, and shuddered lest she should actually expire before his eyes. But no time was to be lost in fearful anticipations, and again laying the lady within the chapel, he hastened to the rocky eminence, beneath which he had stationed his party, and shouted to Banno to join him without delay. The faithful negro soon heard the summons, and as quickly obeyed it, leaving the two Indians in charge of the boat. Austin desired Banno to follow him, and led the way to the chapel, where the lady still remained, without either sense or motion; and lifting her between them, they bore her away towards the beach as rapidly as the nature of the ground would permit. Having deposited their interesting burthen in the boat, they rowed to the sloop, and Austin immediately put the lady in his cabin, and began to apply those restoratives which seemed most likely to have the effect of reviving her. In about a quarter of an hour his efforts were attended with success, and she spoke a few words once or twice, but so feebly, that Austin could not even distinguish in what language they were uttered.

Leaving her to herself he went upon deck, in the greatest perplexity at the unfortunate consequences of his nocturnal ramble. His first and principal source of uneasiness arose from a conviction that the island was inhabited, and by persons too, who would be likely to regard him with distrust and suspicion, and who might have it in their power to impede, or even entirely prevent the execution of his purpose; and the next was, that in restoring the lady to her friends he should be required to explain the circumstances under which he had been obliged to take her on board the sloop, and to give them more insight into his means and intentions than was at all desirable. On mooring his vessel that evening, he had imagined that a plain course lay before him, and that the exercise of a little caution and steadiness were alone essential to the accomplishment of his wishes; but things had now changed their aspect, and he felt himself to be involved in a labyrinth of doubts, fears, and uncertainties.

On revisiting his fair guest, he found her seated in the cabin, apparently quite restored; but before he had time to address her, she rushed

towards him, and asked if she was in the hands of pirates. Austin soon removed her fears on this head, and explained the events which had succeeded their rencontre at the chapel. The relation seemed to reassure her, and she said in reply, "My name is Oliva Mentavros. I reside with a younger sister and a lady on a small estate at the other end of the island, on which we met so unexpectedly. We are, as you may easily suppose, totally secluded from the world; and excepting when we receive occasional visits from our spiritual father, we can scarcely be said to be aware that it has any inhabitants but ourselves and our domestics. Therefore it is not surprising, that your appearance should have terrified me into a fainting fit. I was engaged in my devotions at the time, and though midnight is not, with us, the usual hour for performing them, my afflictions urge me to seek relief from the Holy Virgin at all seasons. Now, sir, let me entreat you to prove that you are what you profess, by immediately sending me on shore in the boat, that I may hasten to relieve by my presence the anxiety of my friends."

"Madam," returned Austin, "your request shall be complied with, and I shall escort you to your residence, and see you safely lodged there."

"Believe me, señor," returned Oliva, "such an act of attention will be unnecessary. There is nothing to fear in our island either night or day; and its peaceable inhabitants are accustomed to go abroad unprotected at all hours."

Austin, the lady, and his former crew, now again embarked in the boat, and a few moments landed them upon the beach of the island. Directing the negro and Indians to await his return, Austin, accompanied by Oliva, followed the path which had before led him to the chapel.

"This is not the best, or most direct way to my residence," said she, "but I wish to pass by our place of worship, that I may remove the lamp which was left burning there; the building is of wood, and might easily take fire."

On reaching the chapel, Austin's eye fell upon a stone tablet near its entrance, presenting the name "Lamberto," in black letters. "Ha!"

cried he, "a grave here! Has death been at work in the small circle that inhabits this sequestered paradise? Who is Lamberto?"

"Speak not of him," returned Oliva, shedding tears; "you revive my sorrows by doing so. Yes, Señor, in this solitary spot, we have very recently been reminded that we are all mortal. But may I ask who you are, and why you visit a part of the world where even the name, much more the appearance, of a stranger has, for many years past, been utterly unknown? Though you speak Spanish with ease and fluency, I can discover you to be a foreigner."

"In that you are correct," said Austin. "At present, I cannot conveniently explain who I am, and what my purposes are, except by stating that I left my native country with the design of bettering my fortunes, and have been led into this neighbourhood in pursuit of that object. I wish to examine the country hereabouts, for I have some idea of becoming a purchaser of land near the coast. Should I decide upon remaining a few days, may I hope that your relations will be disposed to give me any information that may be useful to me?"

"I fear that it will not be in their power," returned Oliva. "Living in undisturbed retirement as we do, and never quitting our own domain, how can we know any thing of the surrounding country? This small island is our own property, and our wishes and interests are as bounded as its limits. However, should you be particularly anxious to learn something about the neighbouring countries, perhaps Father Cambrera will satisfy your curiosity. He is our spiritual adviser, and resides on the main land, about ten miles from this, but often comes here to give religious instruction to ourselves and our domestics.

About a quarter of a mile from the chapel, and embowered amongst trees, stood the dwelling of Señora Oliva and her friends. When it appeared gleaming through the foliage of the surrounding grove, she pointed it out to Austin; and, suddenly bidding him farewell, sprang away, and was soon out of sight. He did not attempt to follow her, or to approach any nearer to the house, being satisfied that it was her wish that he should avoid doing either. Therefore, after surveying the place minutely, and fixing in

his memory some objects, a view of which would enable him to recognize it again, he retraced his steps to the boat, which he found where he had left it, and embarking, rowed back to the sloop.

Now that he had ascertained, that the island had inhabitants, he resolved to enter upon the execution of his plans without a moment's delay, and to endeavour to secure the treasure before any one could obtain a knowledge of his proceedings, or at least be able materially to obstruct them. Having slept for two hours, he again left the vessel at dawn, carrying with him his instruments for survey and mensuration, and also Herkarl's charts of the island. By means of these, he soon determined the exact spot in which the treasure lay, and found to his inexpressible mortification and annoyance that the chapel stood directly upon it, and that the gold and silver could not be got at or abstracted, without previously destroying the building. Here was the most formidable difficulty that had yet presented itself. The chapel, indeed, was small, and constructed of fragile materials, but he saw, that with the means which he had at command, its removal would prove a work of

considerable time, labour, and difficulty, and could hardly be accomplished without the knowledge of those to whom it belonged. Besides, he disliked the idea of tearing down a sacred edifice which was doubtless regarded with veneration by those who were in the habit of frequenting it; and his repugnance to the measure became still greater when he considered that, in his subsequent operations, he would require to disturb the remains of him who lay interred under its floor. Disappointed and perplexed, he returned to the sloop, and spent a great part of the morning in meditating what line of conduct it behoved him to pursue; sometimes resolving to set to work openly, and to employ force of arms against those who might oppose him, and at other times inclining to believe, that conciliatory measures would be found most efficient in overcoming the various difficulties which presented themselves.

Austin did nothing further that day. Next morning, while he was preparing to go on shore, a man in the habit of a priest made his appearance on the beach, and gave signs that he wished to come on board the sloop. Austin immediately sent the boat for him, though he did not

feel particularly pleased at the idea of receiving a visitor of such a kind, at a time when it was so desirable that he should remain unobserved and uninterrupted.

"I am Father Cambrera," said the stranger, on reaching the vessel. "Señora Mentavros, whom I saw this morning, informed me of your arrival and of the circumstances which had been the means of acquainting her with it. The appearance of a stranger is so rare in this part of the world, that I have thought proper to pay you a visit, not only that I may afford you any information or assistance that you may happen to require, but that I may enjoy the conversation of a fellow-being from the busy world. Here we are secluded from every thing, and though the care of the flock of converted Indians over which I preside, is and ought to be all-engrossing, still I love to have occasional communication with persons of greater knowledge and pretension than are to be found in the sphere within which my duties confine me."

An address so conciliating could not be ungraciously received by Austin, who courteously welcomed the priest, and requested that he would

spend the day with him, to which the former readily assented. Austin endeavoured to amuse his guest as much as possible, by showing his books and instruments, &c., detailing the adventures of his early life, and describing the existing state of Europe. In the course of the day, they landed upon the island, and seated themselves under the shade of its trees, the heat being too great to admit of their walking far. Here Father Cambrera entertained Austin with an account of the Indians upon the continent, and his success in converting them to the Catholic faith, and spoke enthusiastically of the peace and innocence that reigned among his flock, which Austin perceived he governed after the manner of the Jesuits of Paraguay.

In the afternoon they returned to the sloop to dine. Austin had given orders that the best of every thing that his stores could supply should be presented upon the occasion. In short, the repast, wine, and other luxuries, were far superior to what Father Cambrera was accustomed to at home, and he expressed himself much pleased with his entertainer's hospitality, and became very sociable and communicative. On

Austin's requesting him to communicate some particulars respecting the family residing upon the island, he replied—

"Señor, you shall hear all that I know, but I am better acquainted with the characters of its different individuals, than with their history previous to their settling here. Señora Carra is a widow about forty years old. Her husband was once rich, but he committed a heinous offence against the true church, and his property was confiscated in consequence, and he himself died in the prison of the Holy Inquisition. His lady, disgusted with the world, and burthened with the charge and maintenance of two destitute young girls, whom she had benevolently taken under her protection during the days of her prosperity, determined to retire to the little estate where she now lives, it being the only worldly possession that fortune had permitted her to retain. Her two protegées, Oliva and Angela Mentavros, are equally amiable and attractive. The first, whom you have already seen, has been under deep affliction lately on account of the death of a young man named Lamberto, to whom she was engaged to be married, and who possessed

an hacienda on the main land, near my place of residence. He is buried in the chapel, and she has not yet recovered the shock arising from his loss. Her sister Angela is the younger of the two, and betrays such charming vivacity of mind and manners, that I often regret that fate has consigned her to a solitude so uncongenial and depressing as the spot where she resides must appear to her to be."

"Does all the island belong to Señora Carra?" inquired Austin.

"No," returned the priest; "only the southern extremity, which forms her small estate. The rest of it is the property of government; though I dare say she might claim the whole without opposition, were she so disposed. Indeed, this bay was at one time likely to have become a place of considerable importance, the viceroy having many years ago proposed to make Alhambra Island, which stretches across its mouth, a naval and military station, for the purpose of watching and destroying the pirates or buccaneers who formerly found shelter and concealment there; but those lawless despoilers have long since disappeared from our coasts, and the

memory of their exploits alone remains amongst us."

"This part of the world is one of the most beautiful I ever have seen," said Austin. "I could almost wish to spend my life here. Do you think", continued he, laughing, "that Señora Carra would be disposed to let me become her neighbour. One half of the island yet remains unoccupied."

"Señor," returned the priest, looking at him inquisitively, "the man that expects to find happiness in this solitary region must be one in whose eyes the busy world and its affairs have no interest, and who has subdued his passions in a degree that is uncommon in persons of your age. I am informed, too, that you have some design of settling on our coasts. If the acquisition of wealth be your object, let me dissuade you from doing so; for you will meet with nothing but disappointment. But if you merely seek peace, security, and independence, purchase an hacienda in my neighbourhood, and I will promise you all these, particularly should you conform to the true faith and enrol yourself among my flock."

"I thank you," replied Austin; "but before I decide upon any thing, it will be necessary for me to see a little more of the American world. It is probable that I shall not remain long here, for the present at least, but should I return, I shall not forget that you have recommended your neighbourhood as a desirable place of residence."

Father Cambrera spent the night on board the sloop, and so pleased was he with Austin's manners and conversation, that he offered to introduce him to Señora Carra and her two wards. Austin willingly accepted the proposal, partly from excited curiosity, and partly because he perceived that he could not immediately accomplish his plans; and that, being obliged to temporize, it was desirable that he should in the mean time avoid any appearance of mystery or concealment, such as might awaken the suspicions of the priest and the family upon the island.

In the early part of the day they left the vessel, and set out for the residence of Señora Carra. Austin now had an opportunity of seeing the whole extent of the island, and he was

charmed with its beauty, for they walked from one end to the other under the shade of richly foliaged trees, and scarcely were sensible that a tropical sun was blazing overhead, except when its rays found admittance through some open space between their intertwining branches. At length Buena Velda, the abode to which their steps were directed, appeared in view. It stood upon a level piece of ground, which, in front of the house, sloped gradually down till it met a ridge of shells, which divided it, as it were, from a sea-beach of beautiful smoothness and white and sparkling surface. The back of the lawn was bounded by a grove of trees, through which paths could be discerned winding in different directions, and on one side a succession of rocks, forming the extremity of the island, stretched a considerable way into the sea, which broke over them in wreaths of foam.

Austin and Father Cambrera, on approaching the house, found Señora Carra and Oliva seated in a kind of portico at its entrance, and employed in needle-work. The señora, though advanced in years, had an elegant form and fine countenance, the predominating expression of

which, however, partook too much of hauteur and discontent, to be a pleasing one. Oliva looked as melancholy as she had done on Austin's former interview with her, and retired shortly after the ceremonies of introduction had taken place. But her absence was compensated for by the appearance of her sister Angela.

This young lady was about eighteen years old, and possessed all the characteristics of Mexican beauty: dark eyes, dark hair, an exquisitely formed mouth, cheeks of the softest and most regular curve, and that personal grace which is natural to the female sex in countries lying between the tropics. Angela took the seat which her sister had left vacant, and joined in the conversation that was going on. Her remarks were lively and often full of naïveté, and she uttered them with that degree of ease and self-possession which shows that the speaker has a character of her own, and has firmness enough to display and support it, though in doing so she may express opinions that are uncongenial to those around her. Austin could not but admire Angela, and his first impulse was to compare her with Señora

Aranillo, and for a moment to give her the preference, though upon reflection he was obliged to admit that Eugenia had more soul and sensibility than he could as yet justly attribute to her rival in his regard.

Austin spent the day at Buena Velda. Señora Carra was intelligent, but of a discontented disposition, and whenever she said any thing that betrayed this, Father Cambrera began to assail her with religious advice, which she seemed to receive as a matter of course. Oliva was silent and inattentive to every thing, and Austin, therefore, devoted himself entirely to her sister, who soon caused him to forget that there was any other person in the room.

In the evening, when Austin began to think of returning to the sloop, Father Cambrera told him that he was then going to celebrate mass in the chapel, accompanied by the family and the domestics, and that he might attend the service if he chose. Austin expressed his willingness to do so, and at the same moment the three ladies, robed in black silk, entered the room, each carrying a missal in her hand. On their leaving the house, he thoughtlessly advanced towards

Angela, and offered his arm, which she declined with an expression of surprise, while the priest quickly requested him to walk behind the party and alone.

On reaching the chapel all took their places in it, and Austin, when the service began, did as he saw others do, and while kneeling upon the floor and contemplating the devotees around him, reflected with pain upon the purposes which had brought him to the island, and almost doubted the lawfulness or the propriety of endeavouring to accomplish them. Shall I, thought he, make this sacred spot a scene of plunder and desolation? Shall I disturb the remains of a virtuous and loved individual, and disinter those of a murdered slave? My projected attempt, whether successful or not, will excite horror and distress in the minds of the inhabitants of this island, and I shall be the means of introducing passion and misery into a place and a circle where, probably, they never otherwise would have been permitted to intrude themselves.

The conclusion of the service interrupted these reflections, and he bade the ladies and the priest farewell, and returned to the sloop in a

state of agitation and perplexity which rendered him more than ever undecided respecting the course which it would be requisite for him to pursue.

CHAPTER V.

After much deliberation, Austin resolved to cultivate a further acquaintance with the family upon the island, in the hope that some crisis might occur which would enable him to secure the treasure without distressing their feelings, or running the risk of meeting with opposition and actual resistance; for the slaves and domestics residing at Buena Velda, were, together, sufficiently numerous to prove formidable to his little band of Indians, were they to take the field against him. Recollecting that Father Cambrera had said that he intended to depart on the following day, Austin thought that he could not do less than pay a visit to one whose kindness to him merited his warmest acknowledgments. He therefore set out for Buena Velda at noon, and on reaching it, found the same party assembled that he had seen the preceding day.

They were seated in a room paved with dia-

mond shaped slabs of black and white marble, placed alternately, and these had just been sprinkled with lime juice and water, the rapid evaporation of which perfumed and cooled the air at the same time. On a side-board were placed three pine apples of the most luscious fragrance, and above them hung a large and leafy branch, just plucked from a guava tree, and drooping with the weight of the fruits which gleamed like golden orbs among the deep green foliage that partly concealed it. On one of the twigs was the nest of a humming bird which was fluttering round the room. When Austin entered, Angela was endeavouring to allure the gorgeously plumed little animal back to its habitation, by placing near it one of the yellow bell-shaped flowers of the American aloe, filled with sugar and water. The room contained two couches and a few chairs, but no other furniture, except an ornamental table, on which was disposed a variety of the most beautiful shells of the tropics. Amongst others were seen the ear-shaped haliotis of the richest blue and purple, the cone species, embroidered with the most daz-

sling tints, and the volutes unfolding their scroll like forms and burnished surfaces, and gleaming with metallic lustre. At one end of the apartment two latticed windows descended to the floor, and a small terrace in front of them was crowded with flower pots, containing plants remarkable either for fragrance or splendour. From this terrace an arched way, formed of bamboo, and high enough to admit a person without stooping, extended about fifty yards. Its sides and top were so grown over with creepers, which had been trained to spread themselves as luxuriantly as possible, that not a ray of the sun could penetrate the leafy covering overhead, nor even a bird find access on either side. This verdant passage led to a grove of orange trees, and terminated there; and it was a delightful relief to the eyes, dazzled by the glare of a tropical sun, to follow its green and sombre extent, where all was calm, and to watch the boughs, loaded with fruit, swinging backwards and forwards to the breeze, at its extremity.

"Forgive my intrusion, lady," said Austin to Señora Carra. "Hearing that Father Cam-

brera intends to return home to-morrow, I have come to pay my respects to him, and also to offer them to yourself."

"Be seated, señor," returned she, "your visit is too acceptable to all of us to require any apology, though it may reasonably enough excite an agreeable surprise, for it is natural to suppose that a solitude like ours can have no charm in your eyes sufficient to induce you to linger in it longer than necessity demands."

"You mistake my feelings," answered Austin, "every thing here appears to me to wear a most attractive aspect."

"Such are your first impressions," observed the señora. "Beautiful objects of any kind are inadequate to confer happiness. In the seclusion in which we live, the mind must have its own resources, for inanimate external things soon lose their interest, whatever their nature may be. However, the contentment which I feel in my present situation, arises chiefly from retrospection. My sufferings and disappointments have disgusted me with the busy world. The fate of my husband has proved that honour, virtue, and

innocence, afford no protection from the tyranny"——

"Hush! hush! my dear señora," cried Father Cambrera, "slander not our holy church. Recollect that it is the influence of our religion alone, that enables you to bear your lot with patience and resignation."

"From what Señora Carra says," remarked Angela, "I have reason to congratulate myself that I have known no condition but my present one. Had I once been familiar with the world, I should probably feel little disposed to be satisfied with my lot now."

"And may I ask whether you are perfectly contented?" said Austin. "Do your wishes never stray beyond what exists within the bounds of this island?"

"Señor, señor," said the priest, "you forget yourself. Why suppose such a thing for a moment? Your question is decidedly calculated to excite those unreasonable desires which the young lady ought above all things to repress."

"Well, well," cried Señora Carra, coldly, "there may be some truth in what you say, but

still I think that Angela has a right to satisfy us on this point by her own declaration."

"Any desire that I may feel to have experience of the things that lie beyond my reach and my knowledge," replied Angela, "arises more from curiosity than discontent. I am very happy here; but I doubt much if my happiness is of the best and highest kind, and I should like to become acquainted with the nature of those enjoyments which belong to an intercourse with the world. Often when I attentively consider my feelings and hopes, I am led to suspect that a solitude such as this, is not a proper and congenial element either for myself or for any other human being."

"Beware, my daughter, of encouraging such thoughts," said Father Cambrera. "Providence has placed you here, and therefore your condition must be the best that can be assigned to you. Our lot is a thing which we must not rashly attempt to alter and amend."

"Contentment doubtless is a virtue, and resignation a duty," returned Señora Carra; "but in my opinion it is a weakness to remain satisfied with our state when we have the means of

improving it. The clergy are always telling us that we should not aspire to any temporal good beyond what we actually are in possession of, but they struggle hard enough for advancement in the church, and seldom refuse a good benefice when it is offered to them. Though I am far from wishing that Angela should acquire a habit of looking forward to a change in her condition, still I should not be sorry to see her transferred from this hermitage to a more interesting and more animated sphere. I think her calculated to shine, both in society and in solitude. How many suitors would crowd here, did they but know what a treasure this island contains in her! Alas! my dear Angela, in what manner shall we conjure hither a husband for you? Had I the means of living in the busy world, I should remove thither, for the sake of yourself and Oliva."

"The prospect, I fear, is a distant one," said Angela, with a sigh. "Oh, were I to become suddenly rich, should I indeed be able to leave these groves with indifference?—No, not if I went alone; but you señora, and my sister, should accompany me. How happy I should

endeavour to make you! Let me see, in what large town would it be most desirable to reside? I should not care to mix much with society; but oh, the delight of witnessing the grand festivals of the church, of riding along the almeida, of attending the opera, and of seeing new faces every day! Oliva, you surely would enjoy all this?"

"No, nó," returned her sister, "I have no wish to visit such scenes, nor even to leave this island. But I should like to found a convent here upon a plan of my own, and to place myself at the head of the institution, regulating its concerns and having the sisterhood under my control."

"Blessed Virgin!" interrupted Father Cambrera, "what ambitious propensities are springing up here! Young ladies, your fancies outrun your judgments. The convent scheme of Oliva savours as much of worldliness of mind as does the gay and pleasurable one of Angela. Oh, smother these weeds of corruption before they grow too high and strong ever to be effectually rooted out and destroyed."

Señora Carra found little difficulty in per-

suading Austin to spend the day at Buena Velda. Early in the afternoon, dinner was served, and the meal being finished, every one rose from table and went wherever his inclinations happened to lead him. Austin entered the arched passage already described, and directed his steps towards the orange grove at its extremity. He was suddenly startled, by receiving a smart blow on the cheek from a guava, which had been flung at him. This was quickly repeated, and on looking round, he discovered Angela, ready again to assail him with several of the fruit, which she carried in her hands. "Señor," cried she, laughing, "you are, indeed, a confirmed heretic. Do you not know that the festival of the intrudo has begun, during which, every one is entitled to attack his neighbour in the way I now do? Having no one to play with but yourself, I have commenced hostilities without ceremony, though I dare say you will be shocked at my forwardness, for I am told that English ladies do not think it proper even to smile upon a man till they have seen him at least three times."

"I receive your declaration of hostilities as

a compliment," returned Austin. "I have, several years ago, engaged in the sports of the intrudo, and am very well disposed to renew my acquaintance with them, under the auspices of so charming a tutor as yourself."

"Thus I return your unmeaning compliments," cried Angela, throwing several guavas at him. Austin gathered some large flowers, and likewise some of the cones of the Mexican pine, and cast them towards his fair play-mate, who, flushed with exercise and sparkling with gaiety, appeared more attractive in his eyes than she had ever done before. At length, tired of her frolic, she sat down upon a bench among the orange trees, and Austin placed himself beside her.

"With such a companion as you," said he, "I should never know a melancholy hour. Whom have you here for an associate? Your sister does not appear to possess half your vivacity."

"She always was of a melancholy disposition," returned Angela, "and now she has reason to be so;—but I believe you know a little of her history. She was engaged to be mar-

ried to an amiable youth named Lamberto, who died about three weeks ago, and only a few days before the union was to have taken place."

"May I ask from whence he came?" enquired Austin. "I thought that there were no people of your class residing in this neighbourhood."

"He was a native of Vera Cruz," replied Angela, "but settled on the main land, about ten miles from this, with the intention of engaging in mining. Previous to his coming to this part of the world, we had seen no one of our own rank for many months, excepting Father Cambrera. Your own arrival excited not a little speculation and curiosity amongst us, which, to be plain with you, has not yet entirely subsided. We do not distrust you, Señor, but there is a mystery about your affairs and purposes which is unpleasing to persons of our sincerity and openness of disposition. You are a foreigner. What can have brought you to our shores?"

Austin became excessively agitated and confused. On all former occasions of the kind he had told his preconcerted tale without embarrass-

ment or compunction; but now, when questioned respecting his real character and designs by Angela, the young, the innocent, the beautiful, and the frank-hearted, he felt that deliberate deception on his part would be baseness and depravity. But to disclose his secret seemed an equally unadvisable and objectionable step; and he therefore stated that he was a wanderer, who had no fixed place of abode, and was visiting different parts of the world with a view to making choice of a country and a home.

"So be it, señor," returned she. "It may seem presuming in a girl like me to inquire into your private affairs, but my mind misgave me, whenever I heard that a stranger and a foreigner had landed upon this sequestered spot; secluded as we have been, how could your arrival fail to produce an impression that something extraordinary was to follow? This may savour of superstition, for surely your purposes, whatever they may be, can neither affect nor involve us, since our fate has no connecting link with your own. But oh, señor, whoever you are, let me entreat you not to do any thing that may have a tendency to disturb or injure the hitherto peaceful

inhabitants of this little island. We seek nothing from the world, and the world ought surely, in return, to leave us in quiet possession of that retirement and serenity which we now enjoy. No stormy passions have as yet found admittance here, and though I know that such exist, only by hearsay, and not by experience, I equally dread encountering them under any form, or witnessing their influence upon others."

"You astonish and distress me," cried Austin, in great agitation. "What is the cause of this prophetic strain? Have my actions as yet given any occasion for these fears; your anticipations of evil make me almost distrust myself, though I am guiltless of a wish to effect any. Do you believe that I am predestined to inflict an injury upon thee and thine?"

"Be calm, and pardon me," returned Angela, "for I perceive that I have distressed you, and foolishly too." Seeing him pale and agitated, she gazed upon him for a few moments with curiosity and astonishment, and then hurried from the place.

Austin continued pacing about the grove long after her departure. The conversation he had

recently held had left a most painful impression upon his mind, and made him view his designs with a feeling akin to disgust and aversion. He thought that he should be happy were some circumstance to occur, which would unavoidably withdraw him from the pursuit of his purpose, and release him from the obligation which he fancied himself under to gain possession of the buried treasure. How pusillanimous, thought he, would my conduct appear in my own eyes, were I voluntarily to abandon the enterprise which I have in view, and timidly shrink back when Fortune is beckoning me to advance and partake of her choicest gifts! What a tale should I have to tell to Señora Aranillo or to Herkarl, when I met them again! With what a contemptuous sneer would the old pirate regard my present scruples! No, the die is cast! I must yet advance many steps, and these may perhaps prove terrible ones, before I can justly or honourably recede in the smallest degree; and since it is so, the more I hasten the crisis, better for myself and for others.

It had been arranged that morning, that Señora Carra and the two young ladies should accom-

pany Father Cambrera to his *Reduccion*, for the purpose of seeing the Indians, and enjoying a little recreation. They had asked Austin to form one of the party, and he had readily agreed to do so, which he now regretted, for his mind was not in a state to admit of his receiving of any pleasure from an excursion of the kind. He should likewise feel embarrassed in the presence of Angela, after the conversation that had taken place between them, and the more so, as he could not consistently with truth assure her, that her fears respecting the consequences of his visit to the island would prove entirely unfounded.

Accordingly, next morning, the whole party embarked in a boat belonging to Father Cambrera. It was navigated by several Indians of his own congregation, who were always in readiness to attend him wherever his religious duties happened to demand his presence. The distance to the main land was only two miles, and the sea was as calm as a lake. Impelled by a small sail, the vessel glided lazily onwards, and the minds of all its passengers, except of Angela and Austin, partook of the repose which characterised the surrounding scenery. The party

landed in a little inlet, and having walked a few hundred yards, found themselves under the shade of a clump of ancient trees, where a breakfast, consisting of chocolate and the fruits of the country, was in readiness for them. Having partaken of this, they mounted the mules which had also been provided by Father Cambrera, and set out for his residence, attended by a number of Indians. Their road lay through a forest, in which tropical vegetation appeared in all its natural luxuriance, and where various wild animals were roaming undisturbed and unrestrained by the habitual presence of man.

At length, they reached the priest's village, which was about five miles from the coast. Immediately around it was an open and cultivated country, bounded on every side by extensive woods, through part of which they had recently passed. The cacique, with a train of people, was waiting to receive them, and they proceeded to the house of Father Cambrera, who described to his guests, in enthusiastic terms, the happiness which reigned among his flock, and the daily increasing number of conversions that he was effecting. "But," said he, "towards the north-

ward of my village, and close upon the coast, there is a small tribe of Indians, called Paxocalcas, which has hitherto obstinately resisted all the efforts I have made to civilize and instruct its members. They are desperate and ferocious, and delight in nothing but warfare and plunder. They would prove excellent soldiers, but I fear that there is little hope of their becoming equally good Christians."

The party spent the day with Father Cambrera, and in the afternoon set out on their return to Buena Velda. The priest told Señora Carra, that as Austin's protection would prove quite sufficient, he should not accompany them himself, having duties to attend to at home. The evening was calm and cool, and Austin and his fair companions travelled gently through the woods, and reached the sea-shore without accident. Here they found the boat which had conveyed them from the island, and embarking in it, soon were relanded within a few yards of Buena Velda.

While in the boat, and at some distance from the island, their attention had been arrested by lights moving backwards and forwards in the

neighbourhood of the dwelling-house, and also by the sound of a number of voices. These circumstances were of so unusual a nature, that they not a little alarmed Señora Carra and her two wards, all of whom, headed by Austin, hurried towards their residence. They had not proceeded far when they met a negro belonging to the estate, who, upon being questioned as to the cause of the apparent disturbance, cried, "Pirates, pirates!—they have attempted to make an attack upon this place, and I suppose would have plundered it of every thing, had not we driven them back to their sloop." "Sloop!" exclaimed Austin, "What sloop; where is she?" "At the other end of the island," replied the negro. "She has been there ever since you came amongst us."

Austin could not for a moment doubt that the supposed pirates were his own crew, and he easily discovered, from the countenances of his female companions, that they had come to the same conclusion. He felt too embarrassed and astonished to be able to utter a word to any one, and hastened away to satisfy himself if his conjecture were correct. This he soon succeeded in doing;

for having advanced a few hundred yards, he found Banno and one of his own Indians in the custody of a small party of Señora Carra's domestics.

"In the name of Heaven," said he to Banno, "what is the meaning of this? Have you really dared to make an attack upon this estate for the purpose of robbery, because I was not present to control and punish you and your brother miscreants?"

"Have patience, my dear master," returned Banno; "it is all a mistake, and the señora's people are deceived. I acknowledge that I landed on the island, with six of our crew, about two hours ago, but only to amuse ourselves. A little time ago we suddenly found ourselves close upon the house, without expecting it, or even knowing that it was there. The servants got frightened and pursued us, believing that we were pirates. This is the whole story and the true one."

"Grant that it may be so," returned Austin, somewhat relieved on finding that no outrage had been committed, and that his people had been more imprudent than guilty. He now, assisted

by Banno, set about collecting the remainder of his crew, explaining at the same time to the domestics of Buena Velda, that they had mistaken the purpose of the latter, and that they were innocent of any such design as had been attributed to them. All his Indians being assembled, he ordered them to hasten to the sloop, and get on board without further parley or delay.

Austin now proceeded to the house, and found the three ladies in the sitting room and in earnest conversation. The looks which he received on his entrance were far from being encouraging, though Angela's countenance expressed none of the anger and disdain which were visible in the faces of her sister and Señora Carra, but only a reproachful distrust, mingled with curiosity. Austin rapidly described how the alarm had originated, and feelingly expressed his distress at having been the means of disturbing a family from whom he had received so many marks of kindness and confidence.

"Señor," returned Señora Carra, "you exculpated your people: it is unnecessary to say any thing more upon the subject. If they intended any outrage, I am satisfied that it was

not authorized by yourself. But as we have hitherto shewn you every mark of confidence, by admitting you freely into our society, and have not been favoured with any thing of the kind in return, I hope you will not think me capricious and unjust, when I say, that henceforth all intercourse between us must cease, till you have disclosed who you are, and for what purpose you intrude yourself upon our hitherto unbroken retirement. I cannot for a moment believe that you mean, in any way, to take advantage of our unprotected condition; but we are females, and the respect which we owe to ourselves, requires that we should not longer associate with one who repays frankness and sincerity with deception and mysterious concealment."

Having expressed herself thus, she bade Austin good night, in a manner that shewed she was not disposed to prolong the conversation; and as he had not yet decided upon what line of conduct he should pursue, he made no attempt of the kind, but left the house and directed his steps towards the sloop. He now felt strongly with what injustice he had acted toward Señora Carra and her family, in cultivating their society and

enjoying their hospitality, while he meditated the execution of a design which would disturb their peace and prove deeply offensive to their feelings. By way of reparation, he determined to communicate to them the secret of the buried treasure, and to offer them a part of it, provided they would allow him to remove it without opposition. He thought too, that in the absence of Father Cambrera, he should be more likely to succeed in persuading them to accede to his proposals than at any other time, and he made up his mind to communicate them to Señora Carra the following day, resolving, in the event of their being rejected, to accomplish his plans by force of arms, should actual resistance from any quarter render that necessary.

CHAPTER VI.

It will be recollected that Austin, previous to his leaving Ireland, had been in the habit of associating with a priest, named Domont. This man was of a most restless and inquisitive spirit, and his chief enjoyment consisted in endeavouring to obtain an accurate knowledge of the character, condition, and purposes of others. The arrival of Herkarl in his village, as has already been mentioned, powerfully excited his curiosity; and the more, as his usual penetration entirely failed in discovering who the stranger was, or what objects he had in view, in visiting so remote a part of the country. Domont had regarded Herkarl's intimacy with Austin, with a jealous eye; and when, on the evening on which the buccaneer disclosed his secret respecting the treasure, Austin went by appointment to the lodging of the latter, Father Domont, supposing that something extraordinary was to take place,

determined to go to the house also, but ostensibly for the purpose of seeing its owner, who was one of his parishioners.

It has already been stated, that the upper part of the house consisted of three apartments, two of which only were occupied by Herkarl; the third had no tenant, and was separated from the others by a thin wooden partition. Father Domont, when he had ascertained that the two friends were closeted together, went quietly into the empty room, and putting his ear to the wall, overheard nearly the whole of their conversation. When the amount and nature of the concealed wealth were mentioned, the priest was agitated with such a variety of emotions, that he forgot himself, and started back so suddenly, that the noise of his footsteps would have attracted the attention of Herkarl and Austin, had their minds been less earnestly engaged. He endeavoured chiefly to impress upon his memory the latitude of the island, and the various particulars respecting its position, and distance from the continent, which the buccaneer took occasion to communicate to his auditor; and when he heard the former delivering to Austin the plans and

charts which would enable him easily to discover the spot, he scarcely could resist breaking through the intervening partition, and forcibly possessing himself of the important papers. He remained in concealment till Austin had left the house, and then cautiously descending the stairs, glided out without being observed by any one.

It is difficult to say, whether Austin or Father Domont went home that evening in the highest state of excitement. The former, however, was full of hope and confidence, and quick and resolute in forming his plans; while the other had many doubts how he ought to act in such a juncture. His first idea was to proceed immediately to America in search of the treasure; but when he reflected that he knew nothing of the Spanish language, and was utterly unskilled in seamanship, and in the management of enterprises of any kind, he felt satisfied that his voyage would not be likely to prove a successful one. After contriving and rejecting many schemes, he at length resolved upon acting an intermediate part. Having been educated in a catholic college in France, he had an extensive

acquaintance with the priesthood of his own persuasion, and on consulting the registers of the different religious orders, he found that an individual named D'Aguira was the provincial at Vera Cruz. This man had been one of his fellow pupils in the seminary abroad, and from what he personally knew of his character, and had learned from the report of others, he thought that he might advantageously communicate to him the secret of the buried treasure, stipulating that after the discovery and seizure of it, a considerable part should be transmitted to himself as a reward. Domont had no fears that D'Aguira would retain the whole of the wealth for his private use, as in the event of his attempting to do so, his informant could lay the affair before his superior in Spanish America, which would be followed by the appropriation of all the treasure to the general purposes of the church.

When Austin announced his intention of selling his property, and proceeding to London, to use his interest to get reinstated in the navy, Father Domont saw through the veil which he employed to conceal his secret purposes, but carefully avoided making any remark of the

kind. He now thought it full time to write to the provincial, D'Aguira, which he did in duplicate, giving him, as nearly as possible, every word of Herkarl's conversation, and describing Austin with a degree of minuteness, that would render him easily cognizable on his arrival at Vera Cruz.

These letters were probably put on board the vessel which conveyed Austin to America; but it happened that Father D'Aguira was absent from Vera Cruz visiting his parishes, when she came into port. Domont's communications, therefore, remained in the post-office till the provincial's return, which took place ten days after Austin had sailed for the island. Father D'Aguira was a good deal astonished by the contents of Domont's despatches. But the existence of a buried treasure was not so much a matter of surprise, as that intelligence respecting it should come from such a distant part of the world. He knew too much of the habits of the buccaneers, to think it at all probable that Herkarl's account would prove to be an imposition; and he therefore determined to take immediate steps to prevent Austin from carrying away

the booty, and to obtain possession of it himself.

Having ascertained that Austin had both arrived in Vera Cruz and departed from it, and that Señora Aranillo had made half of her outward voyage in his company, he went to visit her, with the ostensible purpose of condoling with her on the death of her husband, but in reality to obtain more particular information respecting Austin than he found it possible to procure in any other quarter. Eugenia knew that her fellow-passenger had left Vera Cruz in a small vessel, and from this circumstance, and from the hints which he had occasionally dropped in conversation, she felt certain that he was engaged in some kind of enterprise. The cautious and minute inquiries respecting him which were now made by Father D'Aguira confirmed her in this opinion, and coming as they did from the church, seemed to bode no good to the young man. She therefore answered the priest's question with the utmost circumspection, not even mentioning that Austin had been her guest during the greater part of his stay in Mexico, and endeavouring to draw Father D'Aguira into an

avowal of the motives which led him to take so much interest in an individual whom he had never seen.

In this she at length succeeded; and when she learned that Austin had left her for the purpose of acquiring a treasure, she felt both incensed and annoyed that his love of money should have so far transcended the affection which she was willing to suppose he entertained for herself. But her sentiments soon underwent a change, when she reflected, that had avarice been his prevailing passion, he would have accepted her hand and her large property when they were offered to him, instead of setting out in search of concealed wealth which he might never find, and which perhaps did not even exist. She attributed his conduct to a love of enterprise, and to a spirit of independence, which would not allow him to be indebted for the means of subsistence to the bounty of another, however beloved by him that individual might be.

These conclusions, which in reality were just ones, reconciled her to herself and to Austin; and she resolved to devise means to extricate

him from the dangers with which he was now threatened. D'Aguira further informed her that he had written to Father Cambrera, who officiated on the part of the coast near which the treasure was said to be concealed, inquiring whether a stranger of Austin's description had lately appeared there, and, if he had, what his actions and purposes indicated. "Señor Deller," continued D'Aguira, "will render himself amenable to both the civil and ecclesiastical laws. In the first instance by opening the ground in the search of hidden treasure without having previously obtained permission from the Mexican government; and in the second, by seizing and appropriating to himself articles of plate that have been consecrated to the service of the church, and have consequently become unalienably and unalterably her property. Should Father Cambrera's reply, which I am in expectation of hourly receiving, announce that Señor Deller is actually in his neighbourhood, I shall immediately despatch a vessel with a party of soldiers to make him a prisoner in the name of the Holy Inquisition, and to bring him and his unlawfully acquired wealth to Vera Cruz. But let me entreat you

not to mention a word of this to any one. Indeed, I have been culpable in revealing so much, but, lady, you know the power of the church, and will doubtless respect it by keeping inviolably secret every thing that I have communicated."

Eugenia rejoiced when Father D'Aguira took his departure, for she was much agitated by what he had told her, and perceived that not a moment was to be lost in warning Austin of his danger, and if possible affording him some means of escaping the vengeance of the Inquisition. She therefore sent for a person named Soldevan, whose advice and assistance she thought might be useful in a case of such emergency. This man was under great obligation to herself and her deceased husband, and she placed the greatest confidence in his bravery, prudence, and address, and the more so as his mode of life required the exercise of all these qualities. The scene of his employment lay chiefly in the harbour of Vera Cruz and along the adjoining coast; and he made himself generally useful to merchants and ship-masters, by conveying contraband goods from one place to another, storing

them, secretly bringing off specie, and performing various other hazardous services, for which he was always well paid.

On Soldevan making his appearance, Eugenia explained why she had sent for him, and communicated all the particulars of the subject which occupied her thoughts. "Now," said she, "could you run down the coast with all despatch, and give Señor Deller intimation of what is going on here?"

"Nothing more easy," returned Soldevan, "did I know where to find him; but be assured that the island to which he has gone does not lie in the common track. I should require a buccaneer for my pilot."

"Alas! alas!" cried Eugenia, "this is too true. I did not obtain a description of it from Father D'Aguira, and if I had, I probably should not have understood it. I remember only that it is situated in Alhambra Bay."

"Enough, enough," exclaimed Soldevan, "I am at home there. I know the bay well, and it is not so large as to afford many hiding places for a good sized sloop. But tell me, señora, what am I to do when I get there? You surely

would not have me fight against the Holy Inquisition, for that would put us all aground."

"By no means," replied Eugenia. "I wish you to precede the vessel that is to be sent by Father D'Aguira, and to warn Señor Deller to return here without delay, either in his own sloop or in yours, as may be found most desirable. You are not to engage in hostilities of any kind or with any one, unless in defence of the señor's life or your own. You shall carry a letter to him from me explaining these things more fully. But I trust much to your discretion. Above all things, save him from danger, and you know me too well to doubt my generosity in rewarding your services."

Soldevan promised to set sail that evening, and Eugenia immediately sat down to write to Austin. Having first related all that had passed between herself and the provincial respecting him, and given her reasons for sending Soldevan to his assistance, she continued thus:

"You are well aware of the power of the Inquisition, and of the impossibility of effectually resisting or evading its authority. Let me entreat you then, if you have already obtained

possession of the treasure, to hasten here and deliver up the whole amount to government, demanding one-third only, in right of discovery, though this certainly will not be granted, because you are a foreigner. But, nevertheless, be assured that your only security lies in voluntarily abandoning all claim to the concealed wealth which you may have discovered. Let not a sacrifice of this kind distress you, for you know how to obtain a compensation for it. Should the treasure still remain undisturbed when you receive this letter, you must not continue to search for it, but return to Vera Cruz without delay; and by doing so, save yourself from the resentment and persecution of the provincial, who will thus be deprived of any ground for accusation against you. I fear that your bravery and love of enterprise will urge you to resist, by force of arms, those who may endeavour to oppose your designs; but if you have any regard for my happiness or your own safety, I must insist upon your submitting unconditionally to the soldiers of the Inquisition, should you be so unfortunate as to fall into their hands."

Eugenia having delivered this letter to Sol-

devan, and given him some further instructions respecting his proceedings at Alhambra bay, he left her, to make preparations for his departure, which he promised should take place that evening. At midnight he stretched out of the harbour of Vera Cruz in his own schooner, and laid his course southward; and the ensuing morning, a small vessel containing ten soldiers, and despatched by Father D'Aguira, set sail secretly for the same destination.

Meanwhile, Austin, in pursuance of his resolution to communicate to Señora Carra the secret of the buried treasure, with a view to sharing it with her, set out for Buena Velda to make the disclosure. Having requested an interview, which he obtained without difficulty, he stated that he wished to have some private conversation with her.

"Any thing you have to say, señor," replied she, "must be delivered in the presence of my two wards, for from them I conceal nothing." She accordingly led Austin into an adjoining room, where he found Oliva and Angela at work; they bowed distantly to him, and he seated himself, at the request of the señora, and

immediately entered upon the subject of his visit.

"You have doubtless formed unfavourable prepossessions of my character," said he; "but my secrecy respecting the motives which have led me to visit this spot, has not arisen from their being guilty in their nature, but from a fear lest a declaration of them might excite your alarm, and call forth all your powers of opposition and resistance, however useless such would prove. I am an officer in the British navy, and have come here for the purpose of removing a treasure which lies concealed in a particular part of this island. If you allow me to effect this without disturbance, I shall consider myself bound to offer you a considerable portion of the wealth, and having done so will speedily depart from hence, leaving you to enjoy the acquisition in what manner you please. The whole transaction will remain a secret, and no bad consequence can possibly follow. It is unnecessary for me to state in what way I learnt the existence of the treasure, further than that it was a strictly honourable one; I am no pirate, and have no connection with people of the kind, and neither

offer you the wages of personal guilt, nor would partake of such myself."

Here Austin stopped. While he was speaking, he had remarked the varying emotions of his auditors, and as he expected, some moments elapsed before Señora Carra made any reply.

"Señor," said she, "your communication is a startling one and demands consideration. But let me ask you whether you will act justifiably in possessing yourself of this secret treasure? You acknowledge that it never belonged to you, and that you had no hand in the accumulation or deposit of it. I suppose you are the agent of another, or perhaps the wealth in question has been verbally conveyed to you, but in neither case are you entitled to seize it, unless—"

"Lady," cried Austin, "you will pardon my interrupting you, but I must remark, that this is not a time for entering into nice distinctions. I duly appreciate the feeling which makes you unwilling to contaminate your hands with unhallowed gold, but you may rest assured that you may accept what I shall offer you without fear of doing an injury or injustice to any one. How-

ever, I come not here in the character of a suppliant. I have received kindness from you, and I wish to shew my sense of it by the disclosure and proposal which I have just made. I should be sorry to commit any thing like an act of outrage or violence in this island, and I am therefore anxious to obtain your consent to the removal of the treasure, for that is a compliment to which your sequestered and unprotected situation undoubtedly entitles you."

"All this sounds well," replied Señora Carra, "but can you assure me that your proceedings will not injure my property, or eventually involve me in any embarrassment or difficulty? Where does the treasure lie?"

"Under the chapel," said Austin, "which must be destroyed before it can be removed."

"What!" exclaimed Señora Carra and Oliva at the same moment, "Do you wish to bribe us to commit sacrilege? Do you know who is buried there? Would you irreverently invade the mansions of the dead?"

"To do one or the other wantonly and without a sufficient motive is doubtless a crime," returned Austin; "but when a good and desirable

purpose cannot be effected upon any other terms, as is the case in the present instance, I think that either act is perfectly allowable. But this being a subject upon which we are not likely to agree, we had better drop it altogether. I am quite willing to take the sin and odium of the measures which you abhor so much upon myself, and you shall reap part of the benefit accruing from their execution and accomplishment."

"Never will I consent to such a thing," cried Oliva, vehemently. "To stand tamely by, and see you commit your meditated atrocities, would be to participate in them. Shall I suffer the remains of one whom I loved better than life to be disinterred by a heartless digger for gold? Shall we submit to be paid for permitting such an insult to the memory of Lamberto? Rest assured, señor, that the vengeance of Heaven will follow the execution of your iniquitous designs. Away with your heretical sophistries in defence of their justness and legality!"

"Señora Oliva," answered Austin, "I can easily comprehend why you feel so strongly upon this occasion, and duly honour your sentiments; but pardon my remarking, that your mind is too

much biassed to admit of your deliberately exercising your judgement in the affair now under discussion. Señora Carra, to you I wish particularly to address myself. Consider the advantage which your wards and yourself will derive from the liberal share of the treasure with which I intend to present you. The amount will be amply sufficient to enable you to quit this secluded and unsuitable abode, and to remove to a large city, in possession of the means of commanding all the enjoyments of life. You may feel contented to remain here for the rest of your life, but it cannot be so with the two young ladies. For their sakes, then, listen to my proposals, and throw aside your religious scruples, which, though amiable enough in themselves, have no alliance whatever with sound morality or genuine devotion."

"Señora," cried Oliva, "do not yield to these worldly suggestions on my account. I wish to live and die in this retirement, and I am sure so does Angela, though she says nothing. Remember that the chapel which Señor Austin proposes to destroy is dedicated to the Holy Virgin, and if we offend her, and lose her protec-

tion, of what avail will riches be either now or hereafter?"

"That is true," said Angela, gently; "but might not we apply the money to the service of the Virgin, and then a blessing would go with it instead of the reverse? I should suppose that rebuilding the chapel in a superior style, and burning an additional number of wax candles before her shrine, would be sufficient to deprecate her wrath."

"Charming and persuasive counsellor," cried Austin, "your argument is incontrovertible. Wealth, innocently obtained and charitably and beneficially expended, never can excite the displeasure of Heaven. The treasure in question, while it remains underground, is unproductive of good, and though it might become a source of evil in the hands of some, it shall be our business to employ it usefully and virtuously. Señora Carra, the fifty thousand piastres which you will receive from me ought to be considered as a gift from above, in reward for the resignation with which you have borne your long seclusion from the world."

"Oliva, dear," said Señora Carra, hesitat-

ingly, " don't you think that the señor's remarks deserve some consideration? I know that you love works of charity, and I have often had occasion to regret that our limited means did not permit you to indulge in them. I really find that my conscience is unable to lead me to a decision on this affair. Oh that we had a pious and sensible adviser!"

At this moment a servant entered the room, and announced that Father Cambrera was approaching. Señora Carra seemed embarrassed by the intelligence, and Austin felt that their conference could not have suffered a more undesirable interruption.

The priest, after saluting the ladies, looked at Austin with severity, and said, " I hoped not to have seen you here, señor. Deceit should not intrude itself into the company of innocence. I am acquainted with your true character and designs; but as it would appear that you have not yet effected the latter, I am willing to act charitably and to warn you to abandon them, and to fly from hence while it remains in your power to do so."

" Fly!" repeated Austin, with a contemptuous

smile; "I perceive that you have been secretly overhearing my conversation."

"No," returned Father Cambrera; "I am not in the habit of degrading myself in that way. But I have received intelligence respecting you from the provincial of Vera Cruz. He tells me that he has been credibly informed that your object in coming here is to carry away a treasure which lies buried in this island, and which consists wholly, or nearly so, of sacred vessels and ornaments of gold and silver plundered from the churches by the buccaneers of former times, whose agent or at least descendant you are."

"Oh, horror!" cried Señora Carra. "Is this the wealth that he seeks? We were on the brink of a gulf when you entered the house, worthy father. What sacrilegious deception has he been practising upon us!"

"Further," continued the priest, "a vessel containing soldiers, and sent by the Holy Inquisition, is now on its way hither to take you prisoner and carry you before that tribunal. Hasten, then, from hence ere it is too late. I do wrong in conniving at your escape, but I would not have you suffer an injury while it lies in my

power to prevent it. Oh, if you are one of those lawless banditti that war against the church by sacrilegiously plundering her wealth, let me entreat you to reform your ways and repent of past crimes."

"The señor", cried Oliva, "has just informed us that the treasure which he is in quest of lies beneath our chapel, and has offered us a share, provided we will consent to the destruction of the building and the violation of its sepulchre."

"Infatuated and abandoned man!" exclaimed Father Cambrera; "not satisfied with plunging into the depths of guilt yourself, you would seduce others to be partakers of your sacrilegious iniquities."

"Peace! peace!" interrupted Austin, indignantly. "I 'll hear no more of this. Whether your tale respecting the intentions of the Inquisition be true, or merely a wretched falsehood invented by yourself to frighten me from my purpose, is a matter of indifference to me, for I am resolved to carry it into execution at the hazard of life itself. I fear that you view my past inaction and the disclosure which I have recently made to this family

as indications of timidity, but you shall now find that you are miserably mistaken in that idea. I scorn the thought of making my escape, and totally decline even listening to terms of any kind. Ere yonder sun has set two hours your chapel shall be in flames, and I now inform the inhabitants of this island that they must consider themselves my prisoners. It is also my order, that no communication shall take place between this and the continental shore, and means shall be taken to have it scrupulously obeyed. I regard the estate of Buena Velda as sacred and neutral ground, and no one who remains within its precincts, will suffer either injury or annoyance; but whoever attempts to oppose my designs in any way, shall be viewed in the light of an enemy, and dealt with accordingly."

Several voices were raised to address Austin, but he would listen to none of them, and hurried from the house. However, he had not proceeded many yards, when he heard Angela calling him to stay one moment, and on turning round found her at his side.

"Señor, señor," cried she, "what terrible resolutions are these which you have now ex-

pressed? Oh, if you have any pity for myself or my friends, abandon your intention for the present, I beseech you. Do not be incensed at the intemperate language of Father Cambrera. It would be unnatural to expect that you should lay aside your design of obtaining the treasure, merely out of regard to our feelings. But wait a little. Consider the terrors of the Inquisition. Wait, and something may occur—"

"Angela," returned Austin, "your interference is distracting. I dare not listen to you, because I know you could persuade me to anything. Rest satisfied that I would rather perish than be the means of injury to yourself or your friends, but my resolutions are unalterable. Detestable indeed is the idea that this island should become a theatre of blood, but if it does, the guilt will rest upon the heads of those who may madly oppose me. Oh, Angela, impress upon the minds of Señora Carra and Father Cambrera, that resistance is useless, for Heaven forbid that it should become necessary for me to shed any blood! I have a vessel full of armed men at hand, who will carry every thing before them. I cannot, cannot now recede. Farewell;—you

must not speak. Save me the pang of once more refusing what you ask. Farewell. The struggle will be over before we meet again."

Austin rushed forwards amongst the trees, and was soon out of sight of Angela and Buena Velda: but recollecting how necessary it was that he should prevent any one from leaving the island, he turned back, and walked along the beach in search of Father Cambrera's boat. This he soon discovered, and it being a very small one, he seated himself in it, and rowed away under the woody shores of the island, in order to avoid observation; and reached the sloop without difficulty, after scuttling two canoes which he found lying in a little creek.

He had now so many things to arrange, that he was puzzled what to do first. He had not forgotten the priest's assertion, that an armed vessel was on its way to capture him, and though it seemed scarcely possible that the Inquisition could have received intimation of his designs, he had too great confidence in Father Cambrera's honour and veracity to believe him capable of deliberate falsehood. He therefore deemed it advisable to increase the force of his vessel, that

he might be fully a match for that of the Inquisition, and it immediately occurred to him that the Paxocalca Indians, already mentioned as having resisted the priest's endeavours to convert and civilize them, would form useful auxiliaries on the occasion. He therefore directed Banno to unmoor the sloop, and proceed without delay to that part of the continental shore where they resided, the distance being only eight miles, and to engage fifteen or twenty of their warriors under the promise of a munificent reward, to accompany him back to the island, and to act as allies should their assistance be required.

Austin at the same time ordered three of his crew well armed, to take the sloop's boat and post themselves between Buena Velda and the main land, in order to prevent any canoe from passing across the bay, either to or from the island; for he thought it probable that Father Cambrera would endeavour to procure a body of people from his own settlement for the defence of the chapel. He next planned employment for himself, which was to set out in the priest's boat with two Indians, for the purpose of sounding the bay, and examining whether a passage for

the sloop existed at the south end of Alhambra island. His object in this was to obtain such a knowledge of the navigation, as would enable him to out-manœuvre the vessel sent by the Inquisition, in case she should prove too strong for him, or attempt to pursue him after he had effected the removal and embarkation of the treasure.

CHAPTER VII.

Banno having a fine breeze, made a speedy passage to the continental shore, and found little difficulty in accomplishing the purpose of his mission. He persuaded fourteen Paxocalca Indians to enter his service, promising that the campaign in which they were about to engage should not last more than one day, and that there would be abundance of plunder. An expedition combining such characters was entirely to their taste, and they soon equipped themselves and embarked in the sloop.

Banno spread all sail to expedite his return, and he had scarcely anchored the vessel in her former station when Austin came back also, having surveyed and sounded a great part of the bay, and ascertained much to his satisfaction, that the channel between the south end of Alhambra island and the continent, though very intricate, was deep enough to admit of the sloop passing

through it. He now mustered his forces, and found that, exclusive of himself and Banno, they amounted to twenty-five individuals. He could not, indeed, supply all of them with arms; but this was of less importance, for some would necessarily be engaged in duties which would prevent their fighting.

A minute inspection of the chapel, had made him determine upon destroying it by gunpowder. Its foundation consisted of a series of logs, placed at two feet distance from each other, and covered with strong plank. These latter formed the floor of the building, and two of them were moveable, directly above Lamberto's grave. Austin had at first supposed, that the opening which could be made by lifting these up, would prove large enough to admit of the digging away of the soil underneath; but in this he found himself mistaken, and saw that nothing short of the total disruption of the wooden foundation, would enable him to penetrate down to the object of his wishes. He now deposited the requisite quantity of gunpowder under the building, and affixed various combustible materials to its roof and walls; for as these would necessarily take fire

on the exploding of the mine, it was desirable that they should be consumed as rapidly as possible.

Having assembled most of his people at the spot, he gave them severally instructions respecting their duties. One party, provided with long poles, having iron hooks attached to their extremities, was to pull down the burning timbers, and prevent them from falling upon those that might be at work below. Another little band carrying pickaxes, was to remove the soil at the place where the treasure lay; and a third were to convey the latter down the hill as fast as it was dug up. Austin arranged that Banno should remain upon the beach, and superintend things there, while he himself took command on the top of the hill, and directed the proceedings at the chapel. Scouts were also to be placed in several directions, to give notice of the approach of any vessel.

The sun had set, ere all these preparations were completed, and Austin began to entertain strong hopes that he should be able to effect his purpose, and sail from Alhambra bay, before the arrival of the vessel sent in pursuit of him.

His plan was, if things turned out thus favourably, to direct his course to the southward, and run into some small port in that quarter; for, after what he had been told by Father Cambrera, he could not reasonably expect to be able to escape notice and detection were he to return to Vera Cruz.

A dim twilight now prevailed, and the surrounding objects were gradually becoming more and more indistinct. The evening was calm and the sky clear, and the solitude and silence of the bay continued undisturbed. On a high and projecting point of the island, stood a group of Indians. Another party were seated on the beach below: and at a little distance, the sloop floated tranquilly upon the still waters. After every thing had been arranged, Austin strolled anxiously from place to place, for a little time, after looking seaward, to discover if any vessel was approaching. At length he drew a pistol from his girdle, and discharging it, fired the train which communicated with the mine under the chapel. The report was echoed from every side of the bay. A short silence succeeded. Then came a noise like thunder, followed by a

crash; and, in a few moments, a column of flames burst forth among the trees, as suddenly as if a volcano had opened at the spot and made an eruption.

Austin watched the progress of the fire with a kind of sorrowful satisfaction. The Indians occasionally joined in a loud shout. The whole of the bay was illuminated by the flames, and different wild animals could be discovered standing in amazement upon its shores, while vast flocks of aquatic birds, issued from every creek and inlet with hideous screams, and flew round the island flapping their wings and tossing themselves wildly in the air. In less than half an hour, the roof and upper part of the walls of the chapel having fallen in, the fire had sunk below the level of the tops of the surrounding trees, and its light being prevented from extending horizontally, by the brushwood and shrubbery under them, every thing not in the immediate vicinity of the building, would have been involved in darkness, had not the calmness and dampness of the air permitted the smoke to continue floating above the spot from whence it had originated. There it remained, forming an immense lurid

horizontal canopy, which overhung nearly the whole island. The light darted upwards by the mass of burning timbers, fell upon its under surface, and was reflected back extensively upon the objects below. Beyond the space overshadowed by the cloud and illumined by its borrowed light, total darkness prevailed; and it seemed as if the spirit of the murdered slave had caused a baleful glow to settle round the spot, for the purpose of facilitating the removal of the ill-gotten wealth, of which he had long unwillingly possessed the guardianship.

As soon as the decline of the conflagration permitted a near approach to the chapel, Austin, followed by ten Indians, advanced to the place, which he found strewed with burning timbers, and intolerably hot. The first business was to remove the rubbish that covered the foundation of the building, and by means of a few buckets of water to extinguish the flames immediately around it. Austin then made the Indians remove all the logs of wood which the gunpowder had not displaced, or the fire consumed; and this being effected, he commenced digging for the treasure.

Each of the party had either a pickaxe or a spade, and the work advanced rapidly; but it was performed in silence. Even the Indians, who knew not what they were in search of, looked grave and uneasy, and it was in vain that Austin occasionally addressed a few words to them in their own language, to promote conversation and cheerfulness. The light derived from the burning fragments of the chapel gradually became fainter as these were successively consumed, and the wind began to rise, coming in sudden gusts, which, instead of fanning the half extinguished embers into brightness, swept them away, and scattered them among the surrounding trees, from whence showers of withered leaves were detached in return. Sometimes the breeze would be heard moaning through the forests that covered the continental shore, and then would appear to be suddenly transferred to the spot where Austin and his associates were at work; first rushing furiously past them, and afterwards unexpectedly dying away as it were in the midst of its career. At the same time, the over-hanging smoke lost its density, and extending itself over a large space, communicated a turbid and troubled ap-

pearance to the sky, and rendered the stars wan, and dim, and oscillatory. Austin felt his spirits sink under the influence of the scene, and gladly would have exchanged its depressing solemnity for the tumult and danger of an actual battle with the soldiers of the Inquisition, for which he had made so many apparently unnecessary preparations.

After a considerable quantity of earth had been removed, one of the Indians struck with his pickaxe something which returned a hollow sound. A little more labour was the means of uncovering a coffin. The whole party started back upon seeing it, leaned on their working implements, and looked inquiringly towards Austin. He knew that the coffin contained the body of Lamberto, but though he had expected to encounter it, still he shuddered at the sight of it, and striving to conceal his emotion, cried, "This is not what I seek: proceed, proceed." The Indians obeyed, one of them exclaiming, "Horrible omen!—we shall see something worse than this ere we have finished our task."

The excavation of the ground now advanced with greater rapidity than it had done at first,

the soil within a few feet of the surface having been found very dry and hard. Austin watched the progress of the workmen with the most intense anxiety, for none of those marks which were mentioned in Herkarl's instructions as indicating the proximity of the treasure, had as yet been discovered by himself; and doubts, fears, and surmises were beginning to arise in his mind, when something like a mound of hardened loam was uncovered. The Indians paused, and then struck it with their pickaxes. It instantly cracked and fell in pieces, and an entire human skeleton rolling out, dropped at the feet of those who had destroyed its earthy tenement.

The exhumation of these mortal remains, seemed to Austin to confirm the truth of all that Herkarl had told him, and he now considered himself actually in possession of the treasure, for the skeleton was doubtless that of the slave whom the pirates had sacrificed on the night of its deposition. The Indians again simultaneously suspended their work, and forming a circle, gazed in silence upon the hideous object which lay disinterred before them. Austin was also lost in reflection for some time, but he was aroused by

hearing a rustling amongst the neighbouring shrubbery, and the now dim light of the decaying fire, enabled him with difficulty to discern two individuals within a few yards of him. Both wore black habiliments, and one of them appeared to be of the female sex. They remained stationary a few moments, and then advanced towards the scene of destruction, and Austin perceived before him Father Cambrera and Oliva Mentavros. The former was dressed in canonical robes, and carried a large wooden cross in his right hand. His eyes were immediately arrested by the skeleton, and instead of speaking as he had at first motioned to do, he viewed the remains in silence and with profound attention, while Oliva retired towards the coffin of Lamberto and knelt beside it, covering her head and face with a black shawl.

"Heartless and insatiate plunderer!" cried Father Cambrera. "Are these the evidences of your success? Sacrilege, violation of the tomb, and the proofs of former murder, for in what other light can that skeleton be regarded? Do you suppose that the precious metals which you are digging up, will afford you any protection

from the vengeance that will visit you from above? Look at that young female, upon whose half broken heart you have inflicted a most barbarous and immedicable wound! Look at the coffin, which she even now hopes to protect from further insult. But go on:—remove *all* the produce of your iniquity, lest this island should again be contaminated and accursed by the presence of yourself or any of your associates."

He now turned towards the Indians, and addressing them in their own language, commanded them to desist from affording any further assistance to their employer, at the same time denouncing them as outcasts and rebels, and waving his cross in token of threatened excommunication. He made such an impression upon several of the party, that they dropped their working implements and were about to retire, when Austin, drawing a pistol from his side, presented it towards them, calling out, "The man that first quits me, dies; and Father," continued he, turning to the priest, "you will please to depart hence. You have given an imaginary catalogue of my iniquities. Should you at any future time take the same trouble to enumerate my virtues,

do not forget to include that of forbearance in the number."

The Indians were intimidated, and seeing Father Cambrera and Oliva hasten away, they resumed their former station, and commenced work again. A few inches below the surface where the skeleton had lain, they found several flat stones supported in a horizontal position, and on raising these the long expected treasure was disclosed to view. The place of deposit resembled a small vault, its bottom and sides consisting of masonry. It contained a great number of square packages covered with tarpaulin, and also several strong bags, the irregular external appearance of which, shewed that they were not filled with money.

Austin now fired a pistol, which he had arranged with Banno should be the signal that he had found the object of his wishes. The negro answered it by sending several Indians to assist in removing the treasure to the beach. Austin remained at the site of the chapel, till all the packages had been transferred to the care of Banno; and then directing the Indians to re-inter the coffin and the skeleton, he joined the former,

delighted beyond expression that such singular success should hitherto have attended the execution of his enterprise. He caused his newly-acquired wealth to be immediately put on board the sloop, and having handsomely rewarded the Indians who had assisted him, he advised them to depart for their own territories without delay.

Austin now felt irresolute what course he should steer, for his uncertainty whether or not the Inquisition had obtained a knowledge of his designs, made him hesitate to go direct to Vera Cruz. But his doubts upon this head were soon set at rest, for the morning had scarcely began to dawn, when a vessel was seen entering the bay. Austin instantly gave orders to heave up the anchor, and at the same time to prepare for action, which however, he intended, if possible, to avoid, by taking advantage of his knowledge of a passage to the open sea at the south end of Alhambra island, where his enemies, should they attempt to follow him, would undoubtedly run their vessel aground, owing to the intricacy of the navigation, and their being unacquainted with the soundings. But to his surprise, the strangers, on approaching within half a mile of

him hove to, and despatched a boat with a flag of truce. When it had come alongside the sloop, one of its crew handed him a letter, and he saw with pleasure and astonishment that it was from Eugenia. Its principal contents have already been mentioned, and Austin, on perusing them for a time, lost all sense of personal danger in the absorbing emotions of gratitude and admiration which they excited. "Generous woman!" cried he, "How little do I merit her affection! How have I so long been insensible to her worth and her attractions! This, indeed, is a test of love. She forgets my coldness, and runs the risk of involving herself in difficulty and ruin to save me from those very dangers which must equally assail herself, should it ever be discovered by the Inquisition, that she has thus assisted and endeavoured to protect me, while engaged in the execution of a design which the church considers to be unlawful."

It is almost unnecessary to say, that the vessel which had brought this letter, was commanded by Soldevan, whom Eugenia had sent to assist Austin, and to warn him of his danger of being captured. Austin, anxious for

an interview with his ally, leaped into his boat, and desired the crew to row back to the schooner, where he introduced himself to Soldevan.

"Have you any intelligence of the vessel which has been sent in pursuit of me?" enquired Austin.

"Yes, señor," returned Soldevan, "she is outside of Alhambra Island, and will probably enter the bay as soon as there is light enough to enable her to make the passage with safety. I left Vera Cruz before her, but she soon came up with me, and has kept so close upon my quarters, that in order to get in here unobserved, I was obliged to lie within a cable's length of the shore all yesterday afternoon, and to steal into the bay after it got dark. This would be a dangerous attempt to any man who is less acquainted with the navigation of this coast than myself. But even though they should have seen me sail in here, which is very improbable, they can have no suspicion that I intend to assist you. To save appearances, I carry a cargo for trade with the Indians. What are we to do now? My lady told me that there was to be no fighting unless our lives were in danger, and I think her in the

right; not that I fear a skirmish, provided it is not with the church, which is too strong for any of us."

"I begin to be of your opinion," said Austin, "and I have too high a sense of the señora's generosity to oppose her will, or act contrary to her judgment; besides being resolved not to involve you in danger on my account. How soon may I expect my pursuers here?"

"In about two hours," replied Soldevan, "for I suppose that they are only now getting under weigh."

Austin paced the deck for some minutes in deep thought, and then cried, "I have it, Señor Soldevan. I have arranged every thing. All that you have to do is to bring your schooner to anchor close to the little island, and there await the arrival of the people of the Inquisition. Do not oppose them should they wish to search your vessel, and if they inquire whether you have seen me, or my sloop, tell them that I left the bay this morning by the south passage, and immediately stretched out to sea. After this you may go where you please. Can a vessel such as theirs get through the straits at ebb tide?"

"Certainly not," returned Soldevan. "Her draught is too great to admit of that. In about an hour hence it will be high water, which will enable them to enter the bay, but should they remain within it for two hours, which they can hardly avoid doing, they will be obliged to wait till the evening for the return of the tide to take them out again."

"That is excellent!" cried Austin. "Farewell for the present. I dare say we shall see each other at Vera Cruz. I am now about to set sail. Don't neglect to occupy my station on my departure."

Austin now returned to the sloop, which had continued to lay to during the time he remained on board the schooner, and with a scant wind, and a spread of canvass, steered for the south end of Alhambra Island. While casting a last look towards Buena Velda, he could not help exclaiming, "Once happy retreat, your charms are gone for ever, at least in the eyes of your present inmates! Nothing short of an obliviousness which they cannot hope to attain, will destroy the remembrance of the outrages which I have been compelled to commit on so fair a spot. Angela, who was

most forgiving to the author of them, will feel them most acutely. How I wish I could carry her along with me; but no, the idea is treason to Eugenia, and it must not be allowed to intrude itself again. Well, well, I hope to be able to make the family rich, and this must be my consolation when I reflect upon the pain which I have been the means of inflicting upon its members."

Austin made every effort to carry the sloop as quickly as possible, under the lee of Alhambra Island, knowing that when there, he could lie perfectly concealed from his pursuers, till he had effected his purposes. In about half an hour he entered the strait leading to the open sea, and dropped anchor a little way within its mouth. Here, the extremity of Alhambra Island, and also the continental shore, were very precipitous and thickly covered with trees. While engaged in surveying the channel the preceding day, he had observed a small inlet, running into the latter to a considerable depth, and he now ordered out the boat, with the intention of exploring it, and ascertaining if it would be convenient for the purpose which he had in view.

Accompanied by Banno, and two of his Indian crew, on whose fidelity he thought he could rely, he rowed up the inlet, and found that its water was wholly derived from the sea, and that it was navigable, even for a small boat, at full tide only. The width of its channel did not exceed five yards, near its mouth, and gradually narrowed as he advanced. The banks, or rather precipices, on each side, almost met overhead in some places, and the brushwood growing upon their edges nearly excluded the light from above. Near its upper extremity was a thicket of prickly pears, and beyond this Austin had no desire to proceed, for he had seen enough to feel satisfied that the place was just such a one as he wanted.

Austin accordingly rowed back to the sloop, and on reaching it, made the crew put as many of the square packages of treasure into his boat as she could well carry, and then, attended by the same party as formerly, he returned up the inlet, and set about depositing his valuable cargo behind the thicket above mentioned. This proved a work of no small labour, for he had only three people to assist him in it; but it being absolutely

necessary that the whole transaction should remain a secret, he had resolved not to increase the strength of his crew, at the risk of adding individuals to it on whose fidelity he could not depend. Having, at length, placed the boxes in concealment, he went back to the sloop, and received the remainder of them, excepting two, which were marked as containing dollars, and again proceeding up the inlet, deposited them beside the others, and covered the whole with decayed trees, stones, and brushwood.

Austin on getting back to the sloop, sent one of the Indians on shore, directing him to climb a tree, and, if possible, to ascertain whether the vessel of the Inquisition had entered the bay, because if she had, it was time for the sloop to put to sea. The scout soon brought back information that all was clear outside of Alhambra Island. Austin immediately heaved up the anchor, and having worked through the passage, he spread all his canvass, and laid his course for Vera Cruz, under the influence of a fresh breeze from the south-east, which drove him through the water at the rate of eleven knots an hour. Talaxa, the owner of the sloop, not being ac-

customed to such free sailing, and observing that she lay almost upon her beam ends, was a good deal alarmed; but Austin had sufficient confidence in his own seamanship to disregard the fears and representations of the Indian, particularly as rapidity of progress was essential to the interests, and even personal safety of himself and all the crew.

Austin now found leisure to examine more minutely, than he had yet done, the contents of the bags already mentioned as composing part of the treasure. All of them were filled with plate, such as is used in Catholic churches. Silver and gold crucifixes, candlesticks, cups, vases, lamps, and the images of saints, formed entirely of the same precious metals, constituted the chief articles, and the value of the whole appeared to exceed forty thousand pounds. The two boxes which Austin had retained, were full of dollars, whose stained and lustreless surfaces proved that they had laid many years under ground. He took an inventory of every thing, and placed the valuable cargo in the cabin, that it might always be under his own eyes.

The wind continuing favourable, Austin en-

tered the harbour of Vera Cruz on the evening of the following day, and dropped anchor about two miles from the castle of St. Juan D'Ulloa. The boat was immediately lowered, and leaving Banno in charge of the sloop, he pushed off for the shore, and landed on the public quay. He then hastened to the posada, to procure a guide to conduct him to the residence of Father D'Aguira. This was easily arranged, and he set out for the priest's house, which adjoined the principal convent; but the evening was so far advanced before he arrived there, that he was at first refused admittance. But when he stated that his business was most urgent, and that it concerned the interests of the church, the priest consented to see him.

Austin was ushered into a small apartment, having a stone floor. A marble table stood in the middle of it, and a lamp suspended from the ceiling yielded a feeble light. Here he was left alone for a considerable time, and his reflections assumed a sombre and dispiriting character. He felt that he was playing a bold game, and that his situation was now a most critical one, for should the Inquisition take an unfair advan-

tage of the disclosure which he proposed to make, his liberty, and even his life, might be forfeited to his indiscretion. But it was now too late to retrace his steps, and the exercise of boldness and address seemed more likely to achieve his deliverance from the dangers which he anticipated, than any precautionary measures which it was in his power to adopt.

Father D'Aguira now entered the room, and on seeing Austin, he exhibited emotions of surprise, for he easily discovered that the latter was neither a Spaniard nor an inhabitant of Vera Cruz. "Señor," said the priest, "the business must be urgent indeed that requires discussion at this unseasonable hour. After eight in the evening, my brethren and myself make it a rule to devote our time to the affairs of the other world."

"I am aware of it," returned Austin, "but the importance of my communication will plead my apology. I have just returned from Alhambra Bay, where I went some time ago in search of a treasure which I had reason to believe lay concealed there. I have succeeded in discover-

ing and carrying it away, and my vessel, in which it is deposited, now lies opposite the castle. As the treasure consists almost entirely of articles for the use of the church, I am willing to deliver it into your hands."

"What! voluntarily," exclaimed D'Aguira; "this is indeed unexpected. Are you a Catholic?"

"No," returned Austin; "but though I am not, my inherent sense of justice has prevented me from attempting to defraud the church. But you must not suppose that I have done all this in pure disinterestedness. I expect to be remunerated for the trouble and risk which I have undergone in the progress of this affair, by receiving at least my lawful share of the prize."

"My friend," cried Father D'Aguira, "beware of encouraging such a hope. You know that the property of the church is unalienable, indivisible, and exclusive."

"I am not prepared to discuss such points," replied Austin. "I must simply state, that if you refuse to obtain for me, or to put me in the way of obtaining the proportion of the treasure

to which I am legally entitled, I shall be under the necessity of laying the whole affair before the bishop."

"I have been aware of your designs for some time past," said Father D'Aguira, "and a vessel was lately despatched in pursuit of you. Hence you must perceive, that you have done well to deliver up the treasure to the church. Even as it is, you may perhaps still be amenable to punishment, for you are a foreigner, and have no right to break the soil without permission from government. Let me then recommend that you should quietly relinquish the valuable articles which you have acquired, lest, instead of obtaining a reward for what you have done, you should incur a severe penalty for your temerity. Besides, how could the church give away its sacred utensils to a heretic? Would you have me sacrilegiously present you with the images of the saints, or the articles employed in their service?"

"Father," returned Austin, "your argument is so sophistical, that it is easily answered. Let a reward be allotted to me from the pecuniary funds of the church, which every one

knows are very ample. In this manner you will satisfy me, and at the same time pay due regard to those conscientious scruples which are so much calculated to restrain the exercise of your liberality. You say that a vessel has gone in pursuit of me, but as you perceive, without success. Now, as no one but yourself knows of my arrival here, or of the nature or amount of the treasure which I have brought along with me, I am willing that you should receive and dispose of it as you please, allowing me to retain two boxes of dollars, which I had forgot to mention were found amongst the other articles. Should you consent to this arrangement, I will solemnly promise never to drop a hint of the affair to any individual. We shall be mutually silent, and I believe mutually safe."

"I approve of your proposals," replied the provincial; "but I feel uneasy lest you should imagine, that in receiving the valuable property in a private way, I am desirous of converting it to my own uses. But this would be a mistaken idea; for with me and my brethren, every thing is common, and amongst us, individual advantage invariably is sacrificed to the general good."

"That I firmly believe," replied Austin. "What is to be done now? The removal of the treasure ought to be effected without delay."

"I can easily manage that," said Father D'Aguira. "I have the command of boats and men at all times, and for all services. Not even the guards dare question me or my emissaries. The schooner which I mentioned as being now in search of you, was despatched by my private orders, and her arrival will be reported to me as soon as it takes place, and I can then cause all search for you to be suspended. But in the mean time follow me into my private apartments."

Austin attended the provincial as desired, and passing through two rooms of a similar kind to that in which he had received an audience, he found himself in a spacious chamber, elegantly furnished, and well lighted up. It contained a table arranged for supper, several couches, and various ornamental articles, and a large book-case filled with works in every department of literature. On a sofa in a small recess, lay a guitar, and a book of songs in the Spanish language. Father D'Aguira had left the room, after conducting his

guest into it, and Austin had a good opportunity of examining every thing around him. But, though the change from the paltry cabin of the sloop, to the luxurious abode of the provincial, was sufficiently striking and agreeable, he did not feel much at ease. He feared that treachery was intended, and every footstep that sounded at a distance seemed to his ears to announce the approach of the servants of the Inquisition, sent to convey him to its prisons. At length the voices and tread of several persons became very distinct, and the door of the apartment was quickly thrown open; but instead of guards and gaolers appearing, the priest's domestics entered, carrying numerous dishes, and two or three kinds of wine for supper.

The provincial soon came in, and seating himself at table, motioned to Austin to do the same. While the servants remained in attendance, the conversation was confined to general subjects; and Austin found his host to be a man of pleasing manners, universal intelligence, and very liberal ideas, and totally forgot, in the charm of his society, all his former fear and distrust. On the servants leaving the room, Father D'Aguira stated that

he had given orders, that a boat should be in readiness to convey them to the sloop, but that they might as well enjoy their wine and conversation for half an hour longer. He then asked Austin in what manner he had learnt the existence of the treasure, and whether he had found any difficulty in discovering the spot where it was buried. The latter replied frankly to all his questions, but mentioned nothing of the burning of the chapel, or his intercourse with Father Cambrera and the inmates of Buena Velda.

About midnight a servant entered the room, and whispered something to the provincial; who, turning to Austin, said, "All is ready for our embarkation." He then rose from the table, and wrapped himself in a large dark-coloured cloak, and also gave one of the same kind to his guest, and advised him to employ it in a similar way. They then sallied from the house, and after passing along several retired streets, found themselves on one of the wharfs. Close to it lay a boat, with a crew of eight men. "Embark; and I will follow;" said the provincial. Austin obeyed; his companion stepped on board imme-

diately after him, and they shot across the harbour in the direction of the sloop, and in less than half an hour got along side of her.

Banno was at first disposed to object to their entering the vessel; but on hearing his master's voice, his apprehension ceased. Austin and the provincial only came on board, and they immediately descended to the cabin; where the former proceeded to display to his companion the riches which it contained. The priest viewed the gold and silver ornaments and utensils with a curious and satisfied eye, and proposed that a list of them should be taken. "I have already done so," replied Austin; "and previous to their removal, nothing is required but that you should give me a receipt for the whole, signed by yourself."

"That is an unreasonable demand," cried Father D'Aguira. "You must be aware, that in consenting to receive those things privately, I am hardly acting consistently with my public duty. How then can you expect me to give you a written document, certified by my own signature, which might at any time be used as a means of bringing this transaction to light?"

"You forget your own declarations," returned Austin. "All the risk is mine. Have not you told me that your power is nearly absolute, and that you can, under almost any circumstances, stay the proceedings of the Holy Inquisition? Why then do you fear lest your receipt should at some future time be produced in evidence against you? Is it my interest to do so, and to make myself the victim of that vengeance, which you can so easily inflict upon those who offend you? Should I henceforth be accused of having appropriated the treasure to my own use, what proof could I give to the contrary, had I no receipt to present in vindication against the charge?"

"You have nothing of the kind to fear," replied the provincial; "for I shall always be ready to stand forth in your defence. My verbal evidence will go as far as a written document, and prove equally effectual in protecting you."

"It may be so," returned Austin, "but I am resolute upon this point, though far from suspecting that you have any intention of dealing

unfairly with me. It would be better for myself were I to keep the treasure, and take the chance of escaping with it, than secretly to deliver it up to the church, without obtaining in return, any acknowledgement that I had done so. But it seems unnecessary to prolong this discussion. I will allow you ten minutes to come to a decision, and after that, should you still refuse to give me the required document, I shall cut the sloop's cable, and put to sea, carrying you, and your boat, and your attendants, along with me. What consequences may arise to either of us from such a step is very doubtful, but I will guarantee your life and personal safety as long as our provisions hold out, and as long as the vessel keeps above water."

This communication, and the style in which it was delivered, seemed a good deal to startle Father D'Aguira. He twice looked expressively at the treasure, and then, demanding materials for writing, quickly drew out a receipt in the form which Austin dictated; who, on its being delivered to him, ordered Banno to place the articles to which it referred

in the provincial's boat. Father D'Aguira embarked without delay, and bidding Austin good night with a bitter smile, ordered his men to ply their oars, and was soon far on his return to Vera Cruz.

CHAPTER VIII.

It has already been mentioned that Austin, when about to leave Alhambra Bay, directed Soldevan to bring his schooner to anchor close to the island of Buena Velda. His intention in making this arrangement was to draw the vessel of the Inquisition into the bay, by leading her commander Don Ramonal to suppose that Soldevan's schooner was the object of which he had been sent in pursuit, and thus to afford himself time to escape towards the south passage, and deposit the greater part of the treasure there without being observed. The stratagem succeeded in every respect. Don Ramonal, shortly after dawn, sent a boat into Alhambra Bay to reconnoitre, and being informed on her return that a schooner was lying within a cable's length of the island of Buena Velda, he immediately bore towards her, but knowing little of the navigation, advanced but slowly, and did not reach

her station till a considerable time after Austin had got behind the lee of Alhambra Island. Don Ramonal experienced a bitter disappointment when, on boarding the schooner, he was received with marks of surprise by Soldevan, who declared that he was on a trading voyage, and shewed the manifest of his cargo in support of the assertion. The former, however, imagining that Austin and the treasure might be concealed in the schooner, made strict search all over her, and even caused part of her hold to be emptied of its contents; but finding nothing to confirm his suspicions, he returned to his own vessel, irresolute what course to pursue; and his annoyance was not a little increased when he learnt that he would not be able to leave the bay till high water that evening.

Austin had cautioned Soldevan against giving Don Ramonal any information that might induce him to visit the island of Buena Velda; but the latter, finding that he must remain in the bay till evening, thought that he could not better employ his time than in exploring the neighbouring shores. He first landed upon Buena Velda, and chance directed his steps to the site

of the chapel, where the ruins of the edifice, the fragments of half-burnt timber, and the recently broken soil that met his eye, convinced him of Austin's success, and what was worse, of his having made his escape. While surveying the scene of desolation, Father Cambrera approached and accosted him, for having observed a vessel steering into the bay, and conjecturing that it was Don Ramonal's, he had walked out to meet him. A few words sufficed to introduce them to each other, and the priest immediately entered into a full detail of Austin's transactions, from the period of his first arrival in the island to that of his sudden departure, dwelling long and impressively upon the various outrages which he had committed, and fervently imprecating upon him the wrath of Heaven and of the offended church.

Having finished his narration, he conducted Don Ramonal to the house of Señora Carra, and introduced him to the family, whose alarm and agitation on account of the events of the preceding night had hardly yet subsided. The señora declared that after what had happened she would not remain upon the island, because it might probably be visited again by Austin or by

some of his lawless associates, and that this being the case, neither their lives nor properties could be considered safe. Both Don Ramonal and Father Cambrera coincided with her, and the former offered to convey her and the young ladies to Vera Cruz; for not knowing in what direction to seek Austin, and thinking it most probable that he had sailed to the northward, he had resolved upon returning there without delay. Señora Carra was delighted to accept of the proposal, and, attended by Angela and Oliva, she hurried away to make preparations for their departure, which was to take place that evening. Father Cambrera also was desirous of visiting Vera Cruz on ecclesiastical business, and as Don Ramonal's vessel did not afford the necessary accommodation, he applied to Soldevan to receive him as a passenger, to which the latter agreed.

As soon as the tide served, the two vessels set sail and left Alhambra Bay. They enjoyed the same favourable breeze that was rapidly propelling Austin towards his place of destination; but Soldevan, being to the windward of Don Ramonal, reached Vera Cruz several hours before him. Father Cambrera's first idea on stepping on

shore was to hasten to the provincial, for the purpose of giving him intimation of the things that had recently occurred at Buena Velda; but not finding him at home, he proceeded to the house of the bishop on the same errand, naturally enough supposing that D'Aguira had made the latter acquainted with the existence of the treasure, and with the steps which he had taken to obtain possession of it for the benefit of the church. But in this he was mistaken, and the bishop expressed the greatest astonishment on hearing Father Cambrera's relation of all that had been going on in Alhambra Bay without his knowledge, and immediately issued instructions that Austin should be sought for, and if found in Vera Cruz, lodged in the prison of the Holy Inquisition.

Austin, at dawn on the morning subsequent to his transaction with the provincial, was on his way to Vera Cruz in the sloop's boat. On landing he went to a posada of an inferior description, and inquiring about Señora Aranillo, found to his great joy that she was at that time resident in the city. But he had no intention of yet visiting her, much as he wished to do so, for

he still entertained strong fears that the arm of the Inquisition would be stretched forth against him, and he therefore determined to avoid any intercourse with Eugenia till he could be certain that there was no risk of her being involved in any trouble on his account. But he thought that he might safely despatch a note to her, stating how he was situated, and giving his reasons for keeping aloof. He obtained writing materials in the posada, and had nearly finished his letter, when four men in black habits entered the room and told him to surrender himself as their prisoner. Austin had no idea of making any resistance, and, too much accustomed to vicissitudes and adventures to feel any great anxiety or alarm on the occasion, he put the letter, which had not received either signature or superscription, into his pocket, and allowed himself to be conducted to the prison of the Inquisition.

Five or six hours after this, Don Ramond and his party arrived at Vera Cruz. Señora Carra felt herself a total stranger in the city, though she had once moved in the gayest circles of its society, and was for a considerable time in

doubt where she should now seek an asylum for herself and her two wards. At length it occurred to her that Señora Aranillo, whom she had formerly known, though not intimately, would receive her as a guest for the present; and she wrote to the lady, describing her destitute condition, and had a kind reply in return, and a warm invitation to remove to her house that same day.

Señora Carra immediately availed herself of her friend's goodness, and accompanied by Oliva and Angela, set out for her residence. Eugenia well recollected Señora Carra and her unfortunate story, but had for two years past entirely lost sight of her, not even knowing where she had gone to live; but this did not diminish the warmth of her reception, and both ladies soon found themselves equally pleased with each other. Of course Eugenia's first inquiries of her guests were from whence they had come, and what they had been doing, and Señora Carra, assisted by Oliva, lost no time in giving her a full history of all that had recently taken place at Buena Velda. When Eugenia discovered, as she soon did, that the disturber of the peace

there had been no other than Austin Deller, she could not conceal her agitation, which however the narrators mistook for sympathy for their own sufferings, and under this impression were led to extend their details to a degree of minuteness that completely satisfied her curiosity, ardent as it was. Many were the questions which she asked concerning Austin, and she found it difficult to listen with patience to the terms of reprobation in which Señora Carla and Oliva denounced his conduct, for it did not appear to Eugenia that he had done any thing either criminal or inexcusable. Angela took little part in the conversation, and from this circumstance, and from the intercourse which her friends declared they had had with Austin, Señora Aranillo began to suspect that Angela and he loved each other, an idea which was any thing but tranquillizing to her mind, already agitated by so many doubts, fears, and uncertainties.

At this moment she was informed that some one wished to see her in private, and on obeying the summons she found Soldevan waiting for an interview. He communicated every thing that he knew respecting Austin and his movements,

but was unable to say whether or not he had arrived at Vera Cruz; but all doubts on this subject were unexpectedly removed by the sudden appearance of Banno, who, having come on shore, had traced his master to the posada, and there learnt that he had been taken prisoner by the emissaries of the Inquisition. Eugenia, on receiving this piece of intelligence, could scarcely command her feelings, for Austin had now fallen into that situation of peril which she had done all in her power to teach him to avoid, and from which she entertained but slender hopes of being able to extricate him either easily or soon. She felt unable to decide how to act in this emergency, and was returning with a heavy heart to the society of her friends, when Banno again entreated a hearing, that he might communicate certain things which he had avoided mentioning in the presence of Soldevan. He now informed Eugenia that Austin had on the preceding night delivered the treasure into the hands of Father D'Aguira, who had, after much persuasion, given a receipt for the same, and that he believed the document was on board the sloop in his master's escritoire. Eugenia at once saw through the

provincial's designs, and desired Banno to hasten back to the vessel, and bring either the receipt itself or the repository which contained it. The negro executed these instructions so expeditiously, that ere an hour had elapsed she was put in possession of the paper in question.

She immediately ordered her carriage, and putting on a black silk dress and a thick and long veil, drove to the house of Father D'Aguira, and on arriving there, sent a servant to intimate to him that a lady craved a private interview. She was soon admitted, and when she found herself alone with him she unveiled, and said, "Father, I am come to obtain absolution, not for my own sins, many as they are, but for those of another person."

"Lady," returned he, with a look of surprise and admiration, "your benevolence in seeking that good for a fellow creature is as amiable and praiseworthy as your humility would be, were you petitioning for it for yourself."

"Oh, that you may continue to think so when I have explained my business," answered Eugenia. "Tell me why Austin Deller has been thrown into the Inquisition."

"Austin Deller in the Inquisition!" repeated the provincial, in accents of astonishment, "it is not so! It cannot be! Who has deceived you with such a tale? Why do you take such an interest in his fate?"

"That is not the question at present," returned Eugenia, colouring very highly. "You talk of deception, but are you sure that you do not practise it yourself when you say that you have no knowledge of Señor Deller's imprisonment? Perhaps you also forget having had an interview with him last night?"

"By my saintly office," cried the priest, "I speak the truth. If Señor Deller has really been thrown into the Inquisition, it well behoves me to inquire into the affair. I think I can understand the motives which led you to befriend him, and have only to regret,—forgive me lady,—that you should feel so warm an interest in one upon whom Fortune seems so little disposed to smile; but let us be mutually sincere. How came you to discover that the señor and myself met last night?"

"By evidence oral and written," replied Eugenia. "But I should wish you to explain why

Austin Deller, after voluntarily delivering into your hands the treasure which he had acquired, should become liable to the vengeance of the Inquisition?"

"Señora, you seem to know every thing," returned Father D'Aguira. "Be assured that he has not been imprisoned by my orders, or with my knowledge. Some person from Alhambra Bay must have informed the bishop of Señor Deller's proceedings there, and likewise given intelligence of his arrival in Vera Cruz. How unfortunate for him, for me, for all of us! I will protect the young man as far as I can."

"Yes, you have golden reasons for doing so," cried Eugenia. "Nay, do not look at me with such severity. I have no wish to pry into your secrets; but it is evident that you have not reported to the bishop the delivery of the treasure, for otherwise Señor Deller would not have been taken into custody. I am far from insinuating that this omission is blameable, or has arisen from improper motives; but allow me to say, that you will find some difficulty in exculpating yourself, should your receipt for the valuables be produced in evidence against you, which I have

the power of doing at any time. Possessing this document, I might have applied to the bishop at once, to obtain Austin's release; but my wish to save you from any ungenerous suspicions or imputations, has led me to solicit your own interference in the affair; and I hope that a sense of justice, and of my good feelings towards yourself, will urge you to effect the señor's liberation without delay, even at the risk of sacrificing the mine of wealth of which he has made you depository and possessor."

"Lady, you have come well armed to the contest," returned Father D'Aguira, with troubled looks; "but rest assured, that the production of that paper, which I inconsiderately gave to Señor Deller, and which has most unaccountably found its way into your hands, would neither in the least distress me, nor affect my character, for I can at any time justify my conduct to my superiors in office. However, should the bishop not have yet been informed of the capture of the señor, I can quash the whole affair."

Here Father D'Aguira rang a bell, and going into an adjoining apartment, was in a few mo-

ments attended by his secretary, with whom he held a good deal of conversation in a suppressed tone. On returning to Eugenia, he said, "It is not yet too late. Every thing will go well. The bishop shall never know that the emissary of the Inquisition succeeded in capturing Señor Deller, and I will favour his escape from hence; but in doing so, I must have your assistance. At present he cannot get from Vera Cruz by sea, but he may retire for a time into the interior of the country, and remain there, till the transactions at Alhambra Bay are forgotten."

"My country seat at Velasca will afford him an asylum," said Eugenia, with animation: "but how is he to be conveyed there?"

"Leave all that to me," replied the provincial. "I will engage to put him down in safety within a few miles of your abode the day after to-morrow, and in return for this service, lady, I have only to request that you will deliver to me the signed paper which has caused so much discussion between us."

"Assuredly!" answered Eugenia. "Confide in my honour. It shall be returned to you

unseen by any one, as soon as you have fulfilled the above conditions."

After making several other arrangements with the provincial, Eugenia returned home well satisfied with the result of her visit; and hastening to her guests, informed them, that circumstances had occurred which rendered it necessary that she should immediately set out for Velasca, where she hoped they would accompany her; for they would find its retirement much more congenial to their minds than the bustle and noise of Vera Cruz. Señora Carra was not disposed to offer any objections to the proposal, and it was agreed that the whole party should begin their journey early next morning. In making this arrangement, Eugenia had two objects in view. The first was, that she might be present to receive Austin on his arrival at Velasca, and direct him to a place of security; and the second, consisted in effecting the removal of Señora Carra from Vera Cruz, lest that lady should, by the spirit of communicativeness, make the transactions at Alhambra Bay so public, that they would excite the attention of the

ecclesiastical authorities, and lead to the employment of vigorous measures for the apprehension of Austin.

At sunrise the following morning, Eugenia and her friends left Vera Cruz, attended by Banno, to whom she had communicated the prospect of Austin's early release from imprisonment. Nothing particular occurred during the journey, which was performed as rapidly as their means of conveyance would admit. They reached Velasca in the middle of the ensuing day, and Eugenia, having arranged accommodations for her three guests, gave directions that a small solitary house, in the neighbourhood of her garden, should be got ready for the fugitive, whose arrival she expected that evening.

Austin, on being carried to the prison of the Inquisition, was confined alone in a small apartment. Here he remained several hours without seeing any one, and the gloominess of his reflections made the time hang with distressing heaviness. His patience had been exercised till nearly midnight, when he received a message from Father D'Aguira. Austin's first emotion

on seeing this person, was indignation, for he naturally enough supposed him to be the cause of his present misfortune; but the provincial soon informed him correctly upon that point, laying the blame upon the bishop, and saying that he now came to restore him to liberty, and to afford him the means of consulting his safety by quitting Mexico altogether. "To-morrow evening," continued the priest, "you shall secretly proceed to Velasca, where a lady has made arrangements for your reception and concealment. While there, you must be cautious how you expose yourself to observation. There is now in the harbour, a merchant-vessel bound for England, and in her I will engage a passage for you; and when she is about to sail, will afford you the means of getting privately on board. While travelling to Velasca, you must submit implicitly to the guides who are to conduct you there. You may expect to hear from me soon. Farewell. Be silent and secret!"

Having spoken thus, Father D'Aguira retired, leaving Austin in a tumult of delight, at the prospect of not only regaining his liberty, but of seeing Eugenia, to whom alone, he felt convinced

that he was indebted for the favourable change which had taken place in the aspect of his affairs. At dusk, on the ensuing evening, the door of his apartment was opened, and a man wrapped in a cloak looked in, and desired him to follow him. Austin obeyed without speaking, and was conducted out of the Inquisition, and beyond the walls of the city, where he found a person like a guide, holding three mules ready saddled. Austin's attendant saluted him, and mounting one of the mules, directed the former to take his seat upon another. The guide sprang upon the third, and the party set off at a gallop. They did not stop, except to change their mules, till they reached a large well, shaded with magnificent trees. It was now dawn, and the first living object that met Austin's eyes, was Banno, who had been awaiting his arrival. The faithful negro was overjoyed to see his master again, but as he had been instructed to lose no time in explanations, he conducted him to the house which Eugenia had prepared for him, and then hastened to announce his arrival to the señora.

It was not till the middle of the day, that

Austin was informed that Señora Aranillo wished to see him, though he had sent many messages requesting an interview. The summons found him in a state of painful agitation. Though he fervently loved Eugenia, he thought a declaration to that effect, would, in his present embarrassed and destitute circumstances, appear to be prompted by self-interest; and he determined to refrain from any thing of the kind, unless he perceived that it was sought and desired by her.

The meeting of Austin and Eugenia, took place in an arbour in her garden. The moment he saw her, he rushed forwards and dropped at her feet. Long did they talk, and much did they mutually explain in that retired spot; but they left it with throbbing hearts, and happy countenances, and with the quiet assurance that they soon should meet again.

Two days after this, a courier arrived at Velasca, bringing a letter to Eugenia, from the provincial. She immediately shewed it to Austin, and its contents made them decide upon completing and securing their happiness without de-

lay. There was a Catholic chapel in the neighbourhood, and to that they repaired the succeeding morning, and were privately married.

In the evening, Señora Carra and the two young ladies were astonished to observe the servants making preparation for an elegant supper. The table was laid in a style of unusual splendour, and the banquetting room blazed with a profusion of lights. Supposing that guests were expected, they dressed themselves with care and taste, but on entering the public apartment, found no one there except Eugenia. They thought that they had never seen her look so beautiful, though she was excessively agitated, and changed colour every moment. After a slight appearance of hesitation, she advanced towards a pair of crimson folding doors, and throwing them open, ushered Austin Deller into the room. He was in an English uniform, and Señora Carra did not immediately recognize him. "This is my husband," said Eugenia. "He greets you with a welcome to Velasca."

This announcement was at first received with something like incredulity by the three ladies, but their doubts on the subject soon vanished;

and when the supper was nearly over, the whole party began to feel at ease, and to become mutually sociable. Shortly after the servants had retired, Eugenia said to Austin,—"Time is flying. Make your gift." He rose from his seat, and thus addressed Señora Carra and her two wards.

"It is not necessary that I should explain the circumstances, which have once more brought me into your society. But I fear that you can hardly, even now, view with forbearance, one who has been the cause of so much pain, trouble, and disturbance to you. However, let me hope that you will pardon and forget all my evil deeds, particularly as I am now, at the desire of Eugenia, about to make some reparation for them. This is probably the last time you will ever see us, for we depart this night for Vera Cruz, and expect before to-morrow's dawn, to embark in a ship bound for England, which country is henceforth to be our home. Having been the means of driving you from your retreat at Buena Velda, it is but just, that I should provide another home for you. My Eugenia's munificence enables me to do this. And we jointly beg, that you will

accept of the estate, house, gardens, and equipage, of Velasca. In short, every thing around us is now your own property; and here is the deed which transfers the whole to you, legally and for ever."

Señora Carra was all delight and astonishment. Oliva expressed her gratitude in the warmest and most energetic manner; but Angela sighed, and looked unutterable things, and seemed to be more engaged in the contemplation of Austin's and Eugenia's happiness, than in estimating their generosity, or the extent of the benefits which she was likely to derive from it.

Señor and Señora Deller set out for Vera Cruz that evening, and by means of the travelling arrangements, which had been made by Father D'Aguira, reached it next morning. They stopped a few moments at a posada, and then embarking in a boat, provided by the same person, were conveyed on board a British merchantman then lying in the harbour.

Shortly after coming on board, Austin sought a private interview with the captain, and they had a long conversation together. The anchor was weighed in the course of the day, and by sun-

set, Vera Cruz was scarcely visible from the deck. But they bore down the coast instead of putting out to sea, a course which excited considerable speculation among the crew, for Austin and Banno and the captain were alone in the secret. At length the ship was hove to, within three miles of Alhambra island; and her cutter having been hoisted out, Austin, and his negro attendant, and six men, embarked in her, and steered for the south passage of the bay. The inlet, at the extremity of which the packages of money had been deposited only seven days before, was easily found. No one had discovered or disturbed the treasure, and the whole of it was quickly transferred to the cutter, and conveyed on board the ship. Austin, after seeing it lodged in a secure place, between decks, joined Eugenia, telling her that he had added upwards of one hundred thousand pounds to her private fortune, and explaining whence, and by what artifice, the amount had been obtained and secured.

The voyage to England was prosperous; and Eugenia employed herself during the greater part of it in acquiring the English language, under the tutorage of Austin. On their arrival

in London, he made inquiries respecting Herkarl, and learnt, with deep regret, that he had been dead for several weeks. Father Domont was still residing in his village, but in a few months he left it, and went abroad, without communicating either his purposes or his destination to any one. Austin and Eugenia, after spending a year in travelling upon the continent, returned to England, and purchased an estate, in which they passed the remainder of their days.

END OF THE ISLAND.

SABLEGROVE.

SABLEGROVE.

CHAPTER I.

It was on a clear moonlight evening that a West Indian trading vessel approached the south end of the Island of St. Thomas, for the chief port of which she was bound. She had left London about five weeks before, and carried one passenger, named Gerald Berens, whose object in making the voyage, was to secure possession of two valuable estates that had been left to him by a relation. Gerald was at this time twenty-six years old, and in circumstances that rendered the above mentioned bequest particularly acceptable. His parents were dead, and had left him no patrimony except what they had conferred upon him while living—a liberal education. At the time he received intelligence of his good

fortune, he was holding a subordinate situation in the office of a London barrister, under the hope of eventually being able to acquire the means of studying the law, and qualifying himself to practise in some of its inferior departments. His employer, being well versed in the delays and litigations that often attend the transference of colonial property, advised him at once to proceed to St. Thomas's, and make the necessary arrangements there himself. Gerald saw good reason to follow his advice, and had now got within a few miles of his port of destination.

"Well, Mr. Berens," said Captain Fleetman, as he entered the cabin where his passenger was seated, sipping Madeira and water, "we are going seven knots, and at this rate we may expect to breakfast in the town of St. Thomas tomorrow morning."

"With all my heart," returned Gerald; "we have had a very pleasant and a very prosperous voyage, but nevertheless I am tired of a sea-life; beside, I have been building so many castles in the air, that I wish for an early opportunity of realizing a few of them. May you be able to dispose of your cargo as quickly as I

hope to dispose of my estates, and you shall have me as a passenger back to England."

"So be it, sir," returned Captain Fleetman, "though I fear that that is a pleasure which I cannot reasonably expect. Believe me, you will find plenty of people in the Island willing enough to purchase your property, but very few able to pay for it; and let me advise you to get all the money in hand before you quit St. Thomas's, unless you wish to have a trip back here every time an instalment becomes due."

At this moment the vessel received so violent a shock, that Gerald was nearly thrown from his chair. In a few seconds it was repeated, and Captain Fleetman rushed up the gangway stairs, exclaiming "We are aground as sure as fate!" Gerald followed him, and on reaching the deck, found the Captain's assertion to be a correct one. The fore part of the ship rested upon a shelving rock, her bows being raised several feet out of the water, and her stern proportionably depressed. She continued to strike at short intervals, but not with sufficient violence to injure her hull much, for happily there was little sea and moderate weather at the time.

Nevertheless, Captain Fleetman was in the greatest consternation, and hurried about the deck, cursing the inaccuracy of his charts, and giving orders much faster than they could be obeyed. He first backed the sails, with the view of heaving off the ship in that way, but without success. He next shifted the heaviest part of her cargo astern, and sent the cutter to drop an anchor, to form a purchase; but the depth of water, even at a hundred yards from the vessel, was too great to admit of that being done. All his plans to relieve her from her dangerous situation having failed, he was obliged to content himself with waiting till the tide, which was now on the ebb, should rise, as he hoped, in a sufficient degree to float her off the reef.

Gerald had all this time remained a passive spectator of what was going forward; but he now approached Captain Fleetman, and asked his opinion of their situation. "Prepare for the worst," returned he; "if the weather continues moderate till high water, the ship may be saved, but should it begin to blow hard, we shall be fortunate to escape with our lives."

The breeze at this time was gentle, and the night looked promising, except that large fragments of cloud drifted rapidly along at a small elevation, and frequently dashed forth heavy, though transient showers of rain. The island of St. Thomas, lying two miles distant, was indistinctly visible, and the breakers could be heard thundering along its rocky shores, the general bearing of which was marked by a few scattered palm trees, whose lofty stems and dark foliage appeared in defined sharpness of outline against the blue sky. The vicinity of land was also indicated by that fresh vegetable fragrance which exhales from it during night in the tropics, and which is so delightful to the senses of every one after a long voyage. Gerald was fully alive to this, notwithstanding the perilousness of his situation, and he already anticipated the pleasure of going on shore, although he could not help feeling some uneasiness respecting the manner in which he should get there.

Silence and anxiety now prevailed on board the vessel; Captain Fleetman paced the deck rapidly with his hands behind his back, sometimes apparently lost in thought, and sometimes gazing

SABLEGROVE.

found themselves within a furlong of the shore, and, happily, soon discovered a small piece of sandy beach that promised to afford a good landing place. Steering for this, they ran the boat upon it high and dry, and disembarked without difficulty. "Now, Mr. Berens," said one of the seamen, "you surely do not regret having trusted yourself with us: here we are safe and snug as a sailor would wish to be. Depend upon it, that those on board, Heaven protect them, will feel the salt water close to their chins before this day dawns, unless they take to their remaining boat and join us ere it be too late."

Gerald, though relieved from the apprehension of shipwreck, had little other reason to congratulate himself upon his situation. He was without shelter, money, clothes, or food, and upon a part of the island of St. Thomas, which did not appear to be inhabited. Should the ship be lost, which his companions seemed to consider certain, his condition would be rendered a most destitute and even desperate one, for he had not a single acquaintance in the island, or in any other part of the West Indies, and possessing no documents to prove who he was, or what his claims

were, he could not expect to receive either attention, credit, or hospitality, from any quarter. It is true, that a communication with England would enable him, within three months, to obtain a renewal of the papers which were essential to the establishment of his rights to the property that had been bequeathed to him; but what was he to do, and how was he to obtain the means of subsistence in the interim?

These disagreeable reflections were interrupted by one of the seamen proposing to reconnoitre the neighbourhood in search of a habitation, whether negro or European, though there seemed little probability that either would be found within several miles of their landing-place. Three men, accompanied by Gerald, now set out for this purpose, leaving the others to take charge of the boat. The exploring party found that their undertaking was likely to prove more arduous than they had at first imagined, for no path could be traced anywhere, and thickets extended in every direction. However, after forcing a passage through these for about half a mile, a faint light was discovered gleaming through the brushwood, and directing their steps towards the spot, they

perceived a hut situated in the middle of a small field of Indian corn. Its inmates, on hearing voices and footsteps, opened their door, but shrunk back with alarm when they saw who their untimely visitors were. Gerald entered first, and found a family of negroes within, to whom he at once told his story, without previously inquiring whether any of his auditors understood the English language.

Fortunately, one of the negroes spoke English tolerably well, and, in reply to the questions that were put to him, he informed them, that there was no road from thence to the town of St. Thomas, which could be reached by sea only, and that the nearest European plantation was ten miles distant. He willingly agreed to return with the party to the beach and lend his assistance there, for the seamen were desirous of making a large fire to guide ashore those of their comrades who remained on board ship, should they be wrecked in the course of the night or find it necessary to abandon the vessel. Brooma, the negro, having placed a light in a cocoa nut shell, to prevent its being extinguished by the wind, gave it to Gerald to carry, and, collecting a large

bundle of the dry stalks and leaves of Indian corn to kindle the intended fire, he threw it upon his shoulders, and walking in advance, conducted the party to the beach by a winding path which had before escaped their notice.

Their first business was to procure a quantity of dry wood, which they did without difficulty. Having piled it on the top of a high rock, they soon made a blaze sufficiently great to be discerned many miles off. Round this the seamen seated themselves, casting many anxious looks in the direction of the ship, which was too far off to be visible. But an ominous signal soon pointed out the place where she lay, for a flash was seen amidst the darkness, and the report of a gun rolled towards the shore, announcing danger and distress. The crew immediately started up with one impulse, launched the boat, and rowed off towards the vessel, to save or assist their suffering companions.

Gerald was now left alone with the negro. Every moment increased his anxiety; and he watched the departing boat till it could no longer be distinguished from the points of black rock which projected above the surface of the sea in

every direction. He busied himself in adding fuel to the fire, and kept his eyes almost constantly fixed upon that part of the ocean which was illuminated by its blaze, in the expectation that some fragment of the wreck, or some drowning seaman, would soon drift towards the shore. Two additional guns had been fired shortly after the first; but Gerald, although he listened with the acutest attention, could hear no more, and therefore supposed that the vessel either had gone to pieces, or that Captain Fleetman and his crew had abandoned her.

He had remained in this state of suspense nearly an hour, when he observed something of undefined form floating among the more distant breakers. It was evidently approaching the beach, but so slowly and irregularly, that he could not for a long time ascertain its nature, for the waves often broke over and almost entirely concealed it. At length, part of the timbers of a ship, surmounted by a human being, became visible. Eager as Gerald was to afford assistance to the individual thus perilously situated, he could not at first do so, either with safety to himself, or with the prospect of being

of any benefit to the object of his solicitude. The waves, near the beach, were so high and furious, and the bottom so rocky and uneven, that he could not possibly have stood upright even within a few yards of the water's edge. He was, therefore, obliged to await patiently the approach of the wreck, and its unknown occupant, which he felt the more disposed to do, because the former appeared to be attending to his own safety, by sitting erect and steadily, and retaining a firm hold of the timbers which supported him.

Gerald gradually recognised Captain Fleetman in the figure before him, and called out to him, in an encouraging manner, to exert his strength a little longer, as he soon would be safe on shore. Apparently no answer was returned to those expressions, but Gerald supposed that the noise of the breakers prevented him from hearing Captain Fleetman's voice, and that he did not make any replying signal because his hands were engaged in holding by the wreck. However, an immense wave now swept it forwards with such force and velocity, as to embed its lower part in the sand, from which the retiring

water did not withdraw it. Gerald rushed to the spot, exclaiming, "You are safe! let me help you off those planks. Seize hold of my hand." Captain Fleetman took no notice of what was addressed to him, but continued steadfastly gazing upon Gerald, who, supposing that fear and cold had benumbed his faculties, grasped one of his arms, and disengaged it from the wreck. Next moment a corpse fell forwards upon him, its cold cheek coming in contact with his own—Captain Fleetman was dead,—and Gerald had all the while unconsciously been addressing his lifeless body, and rejoicing to see it approach him. He turned away, sickening at the thought of such horrible mockery, and seated himself in gloom and silence near the fire.

It was now evident enough to Gerald that the ship had gone to pieces, in all probability before the arrival of those who had set out to rescue her ill-fated and ill-advised crew. Captain Fleetman had clung to a fragment of the wreck, and been suffocated by the waves, while drifting a-shore. These suspicions were confirmed in about an hour after, by the return of Gerald's

six companions, and one other seaman, whom they had picked up, while drowning, within a few hundred yards of the shore.

Nothing now remained except for the sufferers to determine what it behoved them to do, for their own relief, under such destitute circumstances. The seamen, having first ascertained that they should be able to procure a small supply of provisions in the neighbourhood, unanimously agreed to make the best of their way to St. Thomas, by coasting the island in their boat. When this plan was explained to Gerald, he resolved upon accompanying them; but a little reflection made him alter his intentions, for it occurred to him, that in a place where there was a daily influx of strangers of various descriptions, and where, consequently, reserve, distrust, and suspicion must exist in a considerable degree, he should have much less chance of meeting with confidence and hospitality than at some retired plantation, and he therefore declined going with the crew. He had learnt from Brooma that night, while watching the fire, that a family of the name of Marnledge lived upon a sugar and coffee estate, about ten miles distant from the

coast, and it was to this residence that he felt inclined to direct his steps, the negro having offered to be his guide.

At sunrise, the seamen having interred the body of Captain Fleetman beyond high water mark, and made arrangements for their coasting voyage, embarked in the boat, and bidding Gerald farewell, were soon out of sight. Brooma now conducted Gerald to the hut in which his father and mother lived, both of whom were free negroes. Their abode, though a humble one, was remarkably neat and clean, and Gerald equally enjoyed its shelter and the inviting breakfast of milk, fish, and cakes of maize, which they quickly set before him. While he was partaking of this meal, Brooma went to a neighbouring family, to borrow a mule to carry him to Mr. Marnledge's estate. The negro was fortunate enough to procure an animal of the kind, and immediately on his returning with it to the hut, Gerald mounted, and set out on his projected journey. Brooma, indeed, advised him not to delay his departure, as the roads were so bad that ten miles could not be travelled in much less than the same number of hours.

At first their route lay close to the sea-shore, but it soon diverged into a wild and extensive forest, no part of which was either cultivated or inhabited. The path was rough and narrow, and in some places so confined and obstructed by brushwood, that Brooma found it necessary to employ his cutlass in opening a passage for the mule and its rider.

"This road appears seldom to be travelled," said Gerald to his guide; "I suppose there is a better one to Mr. Marnledge's estate in some other direction?"

"No," returned Brooma, "this is the only road. I dare say after the next rains it will be closed up altogether; but what matter for that? he never leaves his plantation, and no one ever goes to see him."

"If that be the case," cried Gerald, "I fear that I cannot expect to be well received by him. Do you know why he leads so retired a life? Is he married?"

"There are two madams in his house," answered the negro; "but whether either of them is his wife I don't know.—I never saw him but once, when I carried a basket of fish to the

plantation for sale. He bought them, but told me not to come again; but I had made up my mind that I should not, though he were to pay me a doubloon for every mile of the way: but now that I am shewing you the road to his house I must go on, and stay there all night too, if I can get a lodging with any of his slaves."

Brooma's communications were not calculated to give Gerald very favourable impressions of Mr. Marnledge, or to lead him to expect much from his kindness or hospitality; however he could not now choose or alter his destination; and he determined to pursue his way to Sablegrove, even at the risk of meeting with an indifferent reception from its proprietor. The sun had declined within a little way of the horizon, ere Gerald and his guide began to find themselves in the neighbourhood of the estate, which was indicated by the diminished gloom and thickness of the forest, in the direction in which it lay. At length their progress was stopped by a rude fence, in one part of which, after some search, they discovered a gate, apparently leading to the dwelling-house, which stood about three hundred yards off. Every thing was silent, not

even a dog barking at their approach, or a servant appearing to enquire who they were. Gerald despatched Brooma to announce their arrival to any one he might chance to meet, and remained upon the mule during his absence, which was not of long duration, for in a few minutes he returned, accompanied by an old negro, who conducted him into the house.

Gerald was left in a large, comfortless, and indifferently furnished apartment, which appeared to be used as an eating room. At its upper end stood a sideboard of great dimensions and antique shape, surmounted by a mirror in a gilded frame, much tarnished by age. A clumsy sofa covered with faded crimson damask, was placed on each side of the room, and its centre was occupied by an oval dining table, standing upon a piece of carpet, which did not in any degree correspond in size with either the length or breadth of the floor. A few chairs of the plainest kind ranged along the walls, and a bookcase containing some odd volumes in the French language, composed the remaining furniture of the apartment.

Mr. Marnledge now entered and bowed to

Gerald; and if the interior of the mansion had excited unfavourable prepossessions in the mind of the latter, the manners and appearance of its owner, were well calculated to strengthen and increase them. He looked about forty years old, and was tall, slender, and ungainly in his person,—his countenance had a melancholy cast, and his large gray eyes seemed unwillingly to meet those of any other individual, and usually were bent upon the ground. His well expanded forehead and thoughtful brows, gave an air of intelligence to the upper part of his face, which was at variance with the sensual expression of his deformed mouth, thick lips, and broad, fleshy chin. His manners were plain even to homeliness, and at the same time cold and forbidding. He never attempted what is generally called conversation; but sat silently and indolently listening to the remarks of others, oftener rewarding them with a look of contempt or incredulity, than with a smile of interest or approbation.

The first salutations were scarcely over, when Gerald began to tell his story, but he was interrupted by Mr. Marnledge, saying—"Take a

chair, sir, we can talk as well while seated as standing." Gerald made no reply to this speech, which derived more than half its rudeness from the tone in which it was delivered, but continued the narrative of his shipwreck, not forgetting to mention that his object in visiting the West Indies was to obtain possession of two valuable estates that had been bequeathed to him.

"Yes, yes," observed his auditor, "many people come to this part of the world with the same views and pretensions, but find themselves deceived in regard to the reality of both."

"That cannot be my case, sir," retorted Gerald, rather angrily; "all the necessary documents were in my possession last night, though they are now unfortunately lost; but this will not eventually affect the validity of my claims, because the papers can easily be renewed."

"Humph!" said Mr. Marnledge; "well, what would you have me do? Do you wish me to lend you a sum of money?"

"Nothing of the kind," answered Gerald. "I have merely come to request advice and information. Being a total stranger in the country, I know not what steps I ought to take to relieve

myself from my present embarrassments. I was told that you were the European resident nearest that part of the coast where I was wrecked, and I have therefore paid you a visit, not for the purpose of trespassing upon your hospitality, but to inquire where, and in what manner, I am most likely to obtain a subsistence in the mean time. I possess acquirements which might render me useful to a planter. I can keep accounts, and have a knowledge of general business and its forms."

"All this is very well," replied Mr. Marnledge; "it would be hard indeed were you to starve while almost in sight of the rich estates that have been bequeathed to you. But enough of this for the present; you can at least have a bed here to-night, and supper will be ready soon. 'Till then you may amuse yourself in what way you please."

So saying, he left the room, but Gerald felt little disposed to avail himself of the privilege conveyed in his parting words, for his reception at Sablegrove, and indeed the place itself, had in them something altogether so repulsive that his spirits could not resist its influence, and he

felt gloomy, agitated, and desponding, almost without knowing why. In this mood he approached a large window at one end of the apartment, and on looking from it, obtained a better view of the situation of Sablegrove than he had hitherto done. The house stood upon the summit of a natural mound, about one hundred feet high, and ornamented with small clumps of trees or rather a shrubbery, which had in all probability grown spontaneously, for there was no other appearance of cultivation or order in the vicinity of the mansion. On one side of the base of the mound, lay a tract of low rich level land, which formed the plantation, and was regularly fenced and divided, and, at that time, covered with crops of several kinds. Thick forests everywhere formed its boundary, except in the direction of the house, the opposite side of which overlooked another large open space of ground as flat as the former, but of a very different description, it being in reality a saltmarsh, which was liable to be overflowed by the tide six or seven times every month. It was about a quarter of a mile wide, and its surface consisted of a blackish mud streaked with white, and in some

places alarmingly deep, as was shewn by the cavities left by the floundering cattle that had recently passed across it. The edges of this marsh, on its further side, were concealed by matted and creeping mangroves; and at the inner verge of these, the forest recommenced, gradually increasing in height and density as it extended backwards. A thin smoky vapour had began to be evolved from the marsh, and Gerald watched its gradual ascent into the before transparent atmosphere, and felt its dank and pungent odour amalgamating with the air which he was breathing. The last rays of the sun shed a copper-coloured glare upon the western horizon, and the deepening twilight enticed abroad various reptiles and night insects. The air began to be agitated by the fluttering of innumerable wings, and Gerald was often startled by beetles flying against his face, and humming discordantly about his ears, or made to recoil at the sound of a lizard or centipede dropping from the ceiling upon the floor, and leisurely crawling away.

Shortly after sunset several servants entered the room, laid the table, and placed lights

upon it, and in a few minutes more, Mr. Marnledge made his appearance, followed by a lady, whom he introduced by the name of Mrs. Dittersdorf. Supper was immediately brought in, and the party seated themselves at table; though it appeared, from there being four covers, that another individual either was or had been expected to partake of the meal. The conversation was constrained and common place, and the lady took no share in the little that did occur, though she seemed to feel considerable interest in the details which Gerald gave concerning the shipwreck, in reply to some questions of Mr. Marnledge upon the subject.

Mrs. Dittersdorf was twenty-seven years old, and a Creole. Her figure was tall, well proportioned, and graceful, and her feet and hands were remarkably small and delicate. In her countenance were combined all those qualities that are usually thought to constitute beauty, except a pleasing expression. She had bright black eyes, an open forehead, luxuriant hair, and regular features; but an uniform expression of selfishness and duplicity negatived the effect of these attractions, and rendered their possessor at

first rather repulsive than otherwise. Her manners displayed a degree of dignity, and had a character of decision, which were highly impressive, and in addressing Mr. Marnledge, or giving orders to the servants, she alike shewed that she was a person who would be listened to and obeyed. She had one peculiarity, which was too obvious to remain long unperceived even by the most careless observer. This consisted in an extreme jealousy and watchfulness of all that went forward, or was uttered within the sphere of her notice or hearing. Any unexpected noise seemed to startle and even alarm her, the sound of distant footsteps always roused her attention, nor would she be satisfied, till she had ascertained whose they were; and when the domestics happened to speak to each other, if she failed in distinguishing what was said, she would generally make them repeat it in her presence. While at table, she frequently regarded Gerald with much curiosity and interest; but once, when a responsive look from him gave her to understand, that he was aware of his being the object of her attention, she assumed an air of displeasure and contempt, as if to caution him

against attempting to exercise a like scrutiny upon herself.

Mrs. Dittersdorf retired soon after supper. Neither did Mr. Marnledge nor his guest remain long at table, for the former hearing a bell ring, which was intended to announce to the negroes the hour of nine, rose from his chair, remarking that it was late, and offered to conduct Gerald to his bed-chamber. He took a light, and led him through several apartments and virandas, all of which had the same comfortless aspect that characterised the room in which they had spent the evening. At length they entered a small low chamber, which Gerald found to be the one destined for him, for Mr. Marnledge set the lamp upon a table, and observing that he should send a supply of clothes for his use next morning, bade him good night and departed.

Gerald's first impulse was to examine minutely every thing around him. In the middle of the room, which was laid with flags, stood a small bed, whose musquito curtains were rent in various places, and almost rotten from damp and age. The only other furniture consisted of

three chairs and a dressing-table, above which hung a portrait of a gentleman, wretchedly executed in oil-colours. The windows of the apartment had no glass in them, but were protected by venetian blinds fixed in frames hung upon hinges. On opening them and looking out, Gerald discovered that three sides of his chamber projected beyond the house, and that it was a building which had been added to one corner of the latter, after the completion of the original plan. About twenty yards off, and at the opposite angle of the house, Gerald observed another small building similarly situated to that which he occupied, and in every respect resembling it. In front of him, the ground had a good deal of shrubbery, or rather brushwood upon it, and sloped gradually down till it terminated in a small stagnant pond of water, inhabited by innumerable frogs, which kept up an incessant croaking.

The night was calm and oppressive, and Gerald, feeling little inclined for sleep, notwithstanding the fatigues of the day, seated himself at a window. He had not remained long there when the full tones of an organ suddenly swelled upon his ear. His astonishment was so great

that at first he supposed that he had just awakened from a profound sleep, and that the sounds he now heard were merely the echo of impressions received during a dream. But the distinctness and continuance of the music soon convinced him of its reality, and he rose from his seat, overwhelmed with awe, and listened intently to the strains, which were solemn and devotional in their character, and seemed to proceed from a neighbouring part of the house. He fancied that he could at intervals distinguish a female voice mingling with the harmony, but the chords were in general so full and sonorous, as to overpower the notes of the singer if there actually were one. The stillness of the night, the gloominess of the surrounding scenery, the secluded situation of Sablegrove, and the mysterious and repulsive character of its inmates, rendered the music fearfully impressive, and sublimely beautiful; for it was not in sympathy with any external thing within the sphere of its influence, but resembled a transient and blissful emanation transmitted from some happy and enchanting region.

Gerald's first emotions were succeeded by cu-

riosity respecting the musician. He opened all the windows of his apartment that he might hear more distinctly, and in so doing, observed a light glimmering through the closed blinds of the building, which has been already described as projecting from one corner of the mansion in the same way as his own apartment. Although the music seemed to proceed from a different and more distant quarter, he determined, if possible, to examine this detached chamber, which apparently had an inmate of one kind or another. To avoid the noise of opening his door, he dropped from the window, which was only four feet from the ground, and making a circuit among the brushwood to escape the observation of any one who might be awake, or on the watch in the back part of the house, he approached close to the blinds through which the light was visible, and easily discovered a chink wide enough to admit of his seeing into the interior of the apartment.

The first object that caught his attention was a lady seated at a small table, and engaged in needle-work. One glance satisfied him that it was not Mrs. Dittersdorf, and a second awakened

in his mind feelings of intense interest and admiration towards the fair object before him. The white and open forehead, shaded with dark brown ringlets, the trembling eyelids and their long lashes, the oval countenance, the firm rounded cheek, and the steady curve of the bright red lips, were foreign to the tropics, and bespoke a native of another and more temperate clime. When she rose from her seat, which she soon did, apparently to put aside her work, Gerald obtained a full view of her face and person, and all his first favourable impressions were strengthened and confirmed. Her air, though grave, was speakingly innocent and unstudied, and in her carriage she united grace and firmness, without the slightest affectation. Her dress was white muslin, and her waist was bound with a satin sash, but she wore no ornament whatever. Her apartment, with respect to size and furniture, very much resembled Gerald's own, except that it was somewhat neater and more comfortable, and a bed of snowy whiteness and profusely curtained with the finest green gauze, occupied its most remote corner.

Who can this fair creature be, thought Ge-

rald. How unaccountable it is that the solitude of Sablegrove should contain any one so charming and so superior to its other residents! During the time he had occupied in observing her, the organ had been played with little intermission, and he began to suspect that Mrs. Dittersdorf was the performer. The young lady apparently paid no attention to the music, and Gerald therefore supposed that she had been accustomed to hear it at that particular time of the evening; but his curiosity upon this point had much abated, in consequence of the engrossing interest which the fair stranger continued to excite in his mind.

Gerald felt inclined to remain near the window for a considerably longer time; but a sense of propriety urged him to retire without attempting any further *espionage* upon one whom he had no right to make the object of secret scrutiny. He silently bade the lady good night, and was turning away, when a gentle knocking at her door arrested his steps, and next moment he saw Mr. Marnledge enter the apartment. She started back more in alarm than astonishment, and waved her hand to prevent him from advancing to-

wards her. He stopped, and both parties remained for some time gazing upon each other in silence. "Mr. Marnledge," cried she, trembling with fear and indignation, "I thought that what passed between us a few days ago, would have proved sufficient to defend me from any future intrusions of this kind. I will not hear a word from you. Depart, and beware how you render me desperate."

"My dear Letitia," returned Mr. Marnledge, "you treat me as an enemy, while you are aware that I come in the character of a lover."

"Such love as your's," cried she, "I consider the bitterest hostility that can be offered me by any human being, for it consists of the noxious overflowings of that cauldron of corruption and depravity which has its seat in your own heart."

"You mistake me," replied Mr. Marnledge. "My purposes are most honourable. You know that I am not married to Mrs. Dittersdorf. That I loved her once, I do not deny, but all that is past now;—you must surely have perceived that we are mutually unhappy."

"Yes, yes, wretched, wretched, I should suppose," exclaimed Letitia. "Happiness cannot

exist under any form in this mansion of vice. I have found it so, though I am innocent, and what can you and your female associate expect? But this is a subject too shocking for my lips. Mrs. Dittersdorf detests me, and why do not you do so likewise. Can there be any community of feeling between myself and either of you? Our tastes, our pursuits, and our principles, are diametrically opposite. I am like a spectre that is doomed to associate with beings that are contrary to its nature. Why do you detain me here? Send me from Sablegrove, and then you will have no one to remind you of your depravities, or to illustrate the difference between vice and virtue."

"I know that Mrs. Dittersdorf is your enemy," replied Mr. Marnledge. "In fact, she is jealous, and to elude her watchfulness, I have been obliged to visit you at this untimely hour. Do not you now hear her playing a hymn upon the organ? Listen, listen, she sings too."

Letitia's countenance expressed a mixture of incredulity and horror, and she stood in silent attention, as if constrained to do so by some

revolting but irresistible impulse. The diapason notes of the organ were now heard in a soft and solemn prelude, after which the performer sung the following words:—

> "Ave Maria, Mother kind and pure,
> My soul breathes forth a prayer to thee."

"What mockery is this!" cried Letitia, turning towards Mr. Marnledge, whose face was under the withering influence of a diabolical sneer. "Which of you is the most reckless and daring; you to call my attention to such words, while your mind is full of the most iniquitous wishes and suggestions, or she thus to address the emblem of that purity and innocence which she is, and long has been, in the daily habit of outraging."

"I admire your sentiments," said Mr. Marnledge, "and never till now did I feel so strongly what a contrast there is between Mrs. Dittersdorf and yourself, and I therefore am more than usually desirous that you should supply her place at Sablegrove. Nay, do not start or shudder; I wish to make you my wife, and to break off all communication with your rival."

"Rival!" repeated Letitia, "why not say fellow criminal at once. It would not be carrying the insult or degradation further. But the information you give me is important, and I shall take care to profit by it, by disclosing to Mrs. Dittersdorf what your designs are respecting herself and me."

"Nay, nay," replied Mr. Marmledge, in a soothing tone, "there you would act intemperately, and probably fall a victim to your own rashness. Forbear a little, and I promise not to trouble you upon this subject for some time to come. I have a plan in view, which, if executed, will be favourable to the happiness of all parties. Meanwhile, consider me your natural protector, and confide in me accordingly."

"Never!" cried Letitia. "Henceforth I shall distrust every word you utter, and every thing you do. After this night there shall be no terms kept between us. I now denounce you as a treacherous guardian and an unprincipled villain. You talk of being my natural protector! This is well. My father, when dying, and about to leave me an orphan, did indeed commit me to your care, and also enjoined me to regard you

as a parent, but he knew nothing of your character at the time; and I now consider myself entitled to withdraw from you all show of respect or obedience, and to act entirely upon my own responsibility. I have a thousand times entreated permission to leave this house, but you have invariably refused to grant it, and have used means to render my escape impracticable. Your reasons for so doing are sufficiently apparent, but be careful how you persevere in your interdiction, for the chance of perishing in the forests may perhaps soon become preferable in my eyes, to the shelter of Sablegrove."

"You talk ravingly," said Mr. Marnledge; "you surely do not dream of attempting to escape from hence. Where would you wish to go? I think it my duty to detain you here, because you have no other home or place of refuge. I am at a loss to understand why you feel so discontented. It is true that your personal accommodation is not what I should wish it to be, but Mrs. Dittersdorf will not allow me to add to your comforts. So you may perceive that it is your interest as well as mine to accomplish her

removal as soon as possible, and I think it may be done in a way that need not offend your delicacy."

"Peace, peace, your insinuations are detestable. I will not listen to any more of them. I have twice told you to begone. I do not intend to speak the command a third time."

"Then," returned Mr. Marnledge, "will you promise not to mention to a certain person what has occurred to-night; you surely would not wish to disturb the harmony of the family."

"Harmony!" retorted Letitia, with a bitter smile. "Rather say, do not increase the discord. I engage to be silent while it suits my purposes, and no longer. But take warning from the past. Does not personal experience teach you an awful lesson of what a woman may dare to do while under the influence of love or jealousy?"

He threw one wild glance upon Letitia, and hurried out of the room. She remained motionless, and absorbed in thought for some moments, and then suddenly burst into tears, and dropping

on her knees covered her face with her hands, and seemed to engage in prayer. Gerald silently partook of all her emotions: and, bewildered by the events of the evening, returned to his chamber.

CHAPTER II.

Next morning, if Gerald regarded his host with additional dislike, he also felt an increased interest in him and the female inmates of Sablegrove. He did not leave his room till a negro boy came to summon him to breakfast, which was served in the apartment in which he had supped the preceding evening. He found Mr. Marnledge and Mrs. Dittersdorf already seated at table; and to his surprise and delight, Letitia entered the room at the same moment as himself, and was coldly and ceremoniously introduced under the name of Miss Everhard.

"I perceive," said Mr. Marnledge, addressing Gerald, "that you have never before been a resident of a hot climate, where, as you will soon learn, early rising is equally essential to health, and to the despatch of business."

"I do not doubt that," replied Gerald; "but I have been up since sunrise, though I remained

in my chamber. My habits of life have not indeed hitherto been favourable to the practice to which you allude, for you must be aware that nothing is done in London, except by the lower classes, till ten or eleven in the day. However, I might well be excused had I overslept myself this morning for I sat late last night, fascinated into forgetfulness of the hour by delightful music."

Mrs. Dittersdorf acknowledged the application of his last sentence by a slight and distant bow, and Mr. Marnledge looked severely towards him, as if to intimate that he was presuming too far. Gerald felt his cheeks tingle, but suppressed any appearance of resentment, and remained silent during the rest of the morning. Letitia sat opposite to him, and a glance at her countenance acted like a talisman in dissipating and neutralizing the malign and repulsive influence of his host's and Mrs. Dittersdorf's sombre visages. Mr. Marnledge affected a style of parental attention to Letitia, asking what she would choose to eat, inquiring whether she had walked out that morning, and recommending that she should be careful of her health, as the rainy sea-

son was approaching. She listened to him quietly and unconcernedly, while the self-complacency of unblemished innocence beaming in her looks, and the clearness of her eyes and transparency of her complexion, rendered her so striking a contrast to the sullen, sallow, and suspicious Mrs. Dittersdorf, that Gerald, while turning his eyes from one to the other, felt as strong a transition as if he were viewing a serene bright sky and a dark stormy cloud alternately.

After breakfast, Mr. Marnledge requested Gerald to follow him into his office, and thus addressed him: "I have been considering your present destitute condition, and am willing to afford you all the relief in my power, provided you yield me the return that lies in yours. You stated yesterday that you are capable of managing accounts, and conducting general business; if so, I shall employ you upon my estate. We can arrange the terms afterwards, when we have ascertained how we like each other. Should my plan be agreeable, you may commence your duties to-day."

"Your proposal is somewhat sudden," replied Gerald, "but I do not object to it, though I am

inclined to hope that my stay under your roof may be of such short duration as to render my services rather nominal than otherwise. In the mean time, I am anxious to write to England without delay, for a renewal of the documents which I have lost by shipwreck, and which are necessary to enable me to gain possession of my property in this island. I must request your assistance in getting the letters forwarded to St. Thomas's, or any other place from whence they are likely soonest to be despatched to their destination."

"Whenever an opportunity of the kind does occur," returned Mr. Marnledge, "you shall be apprized of it; but you must naturally suppose that such are very rare. Sablegrove is many miles distant from any public road, or even habitation, and I have employment enough for my slaves without making couriers of them. If you will attend me to the estate, you shall be initiated into your new duties."

Mr. Marnledge now conducted Gerald to a large wooden building in the middle of the plantation. Beneath its roof various kinds of machinery were in operation, converting the produce

into a marketable state; while on the outside, bands of negroes, under the control of a mulatto overseer, followed their respective occupations with silent and constrained assiduity. The scene was by no means an agreeable one, and so different from what Gerald had a few days before anticipated being engaged in, that his pride revolted at the idea of his becoming superintendant of business of such a nature as was now going on before him. Mr. Wardledge, having pointed out a small room containing a stool and a desk as his proper station for the remainder of the day, left him, and returned to the dwelling-house.

Gerald found his duties to consist in making entries in various books, and under various forms, of the quantities and quality of the different articles of produce that were brought into the store-house in a raw state, or submitted to manufacture, or deposited in readiness for market. The overseer, a corpulent and insolent looking mulatto, wearing a broad-rimmed straw hat bound with a black ribbon, came to deliver a report upon the subject every quarter of an hour. On these occasions he approached close to Gerald, and having first withdrawn his pipe from his

mouth, and puffed a cloud of tobacco fumes in the face of the former, bawled out the amount and nature of the entry that was to be made.

Early in the evening, Gerald, after a day of fatigue and confinement, brought his business to a close, and set out upon a stroll through the estate, by way of recreation. His reflections during his ramble were of a very dispiriting kind, and he now regretted that he had so hastily and inconsiderately accepted employment from Mr. Marnledge, thereby demeaning himself, and, as it were, putting his actions under the control of the latter. The peculiar situation of Sablegrove was also well calculated to excite uneasiness and anxiety. Its secludedness, its distance from any town or peopled district, and the difficulty of having any communication with other places, rendered it a kind of prison, from which egress was impracticable, without the consent and assistance of the gaoler. The characters and respective circumstances of its inmates seemed likely to make his abode amongst them an unpleasant one, and there was no small chance of his being involved in some of the domestic broils and disturbances that would probably sooner or

later divide and disturb the family circle. Upon the whole, Gerald bitterly repented that he had not accompanied the seamen to St. Thomas's, where, though his condition might have been more destitute than it now was, he should at least have been his own master, and have enjoyed free power of action. The only thing that reconciled him to Sablegrove, was the idea of being able to protect Letitia Everhard from the insults and insidious designs of Mr. Marnledge; and he felt that honour and conscience alike forbade his seeking a change of residence for himself, while the young lady remained unfriended and in jeopardy. He therefore made up his mind to bear his lot patiently for the present, but above all to conduct himself with the utmost circumspection, and in the mean time to collect such information respecting the neighbourhood of Sablegrove, as might prove essential to him in the event of his quitting the house of his employer.

Gerald, while pursuing his walk along the edge of the saltmarsh, observed an old negro woman half sunk in it, and struggling to extricate herself. Though several slaves were pass-

ing the spot at the time, they did not afford her any assistance, but rather seemed to avoid going near her. Gerald, disgusted at their apparent inhumanity, seized a bundle of bamboos which happened to be lying at no great distance, and placed them upon the surface of the mud, so as to form a kind of raft capable of supporting his weight. By walking along this, he got close to the female, and, helping her out of the swamp, conducted her to a piece of dry and firm ground, besides saving a basket of fruit and vegetables, which she had dropped and left behind during her difficulties. She looked at Gerald earnestly, with a strong expression of gratitude, and said, "Good and kind master, where did you come from? I never saw but three white faces on this estate. I hope, for your own sake, that you are not come to stay here. I am a poor old slave, but may yet be able to do you some good. If you ever fall sick, which God prevent! send for Unda, the *Obi* woman; she knows more than she gets credit for. Good evening to your honour."

Gerald returned to the house at sunset, and wandered through every accessible part of it, in the hope of seeing Miss Everhard; but he was

disappointed till supper assembled the whole party at the usual hour. In the course of the meal, he was particularly struck with the hauteur and reserve of manner which Mrs. Dittersdorf and Mr. Marnledge assumed towards him; and some expressions dropped by the latter made him understand that he was to consider himself a dependent of the family, and bound to observe a submissive and respectful style of manners to its members, upon whom his conversation was never to be intruded, except when called for. Gerald had often heard of the distant reserve with which the West India planters are in the habit of treating the young men in their employ, even though of a class superior to themselves, but he never had imagined that Mr. Marnledge would view him in the light of one who had come to the island to earn a livelihood, and he therefore felt the more mortified on discovering his mistake. Indeed, nothing but a dread of immediate evil consequences prevented his resenting the style of behaviour now adopted towards him by his host and Mrs. Dittersdorf.

The four succeeding days passed without any particular occurrence, except that Gerald had,

on more than one occasion, found an opportunity of conversing a little with Miss Everhard, who did not manifest towards him the same contempt that the rest of the family did. In seeking her society he had two objects in view; the one personal in its nature, and the other connected with his regard for her welfare. In the former case he felt anxious to inform her who he was, and what his real prospects and pretensions were; and, in the latter, he wished to offer his assistance and protection at any time that they might be available. He succeeded in his first purpose; but found that it was yet too soon, at least consistently with delicacy, to give her any intimation of the second.

One night Gerald could not sleep, though he had spent an unusually busy and fatiguing day. After many vain efforts at repose, he got out of bed, and walked about his apartment, in which, according to the custom of tropical countries, he always kept a lamp burning the whole night. The weather was sultry and calm, and chill and tempestuous, by turns. Sometimes an interval of oppressive and glowing stillness would be succeeded by sudden and furious gusts of damp

wind, roaring among the trees, and sweeping through the venetians, as if about to shatter them in pieces. At such times, Gerald's previous sensations of suffocating heat were changed into shiverings, which forced him to cover himself with warm clothing. The blast would then subside as suddenly as it had risen, and in the stillness that followed, the various tribes of insects that had been dispersed by the agitation of the air, would re-assemble with gratulatory hummings, and whirl round the lamp, or sweep the walls of the apartment with their horny wings, making the silence of night *audible*, as it is or can be in tropical countries alone.

Gerald alternately paced about his chamber or seated himself upon his bed; and while in the latter position, his eye was accidentally caught by a bundle of old papers placed between the back of the picture already mentioned and the wall, from which it was suspended in an inclining position. Glad of any thing to engage his attention, he pulled the papers from their lurking place, and began to examine them. The first two or three consisted of old plantation accounts, registers of negroes, and other uninter-

esting documents of a similar kind, which Gerald threw aside without perusal. At length he laid his hand upon a newspaper, dated about a year back, and published at St. Thomas's. One of its columns was headed in the following way: "Trial of Maria Dittersdorf for poisoning her husband."

Gerald was startled. Could this be the individual of that name who now was an inmate of Sablegrove? The thing seemed impossible; but he read on with intense interest, heightened by suspicion and uncertainty. The paragraph however was not calculated to satisfy his curiosity; for it contained merely an abstract of the affair, and ran in the following words.

"Yesterday this important trial was brought to a conclusion. No new or particular evidence against the prisoner has been elicited in the course of the last two days' examination; but it appears that she had lived on very bad terms with her deceased husband for many months previous to his sudden and unaccountable death, and that she had been in the habit of receiving letters from, and meeting privately with a gentleman residing in her neighbourhood. We

suppress his name; but it will surprise our readers to be informed that this seducer (a title which we have every reason to believe that he deserves) possesses no personal attractions whatever, being nearly forty years of age, and of a repulsive physiognomy. There is no proof that his intercourse with Mrs. Dittersdorf assumed a criminal character while her husband was alive; indeed, the jealous disposition of the latter, and the restraints which he imposed upon his wife, would go far to prevent the possibility of any thing of the kind, while they might at the same time lead to that catastrophe of which he was the victim. Mrs. Dittersdorf, on hearing her acquittal pronounced, betrayed great emotion, and after leaving the court fainted away, though she had conducted herself with much self-possession during the trial. She appears about twenty-six years old, and is a native of Martinique. She married at an early age, in obedience to the commands of her parents. Her husband, besides being of an irritable temper and uncongenial disposition, was notorious for his infidelities and his avarice, and in no one respect calculated to add to the happiness of a young woman of

gaiety and high spirits. The gentleman above alluded to has sold his property in this neighbourhood, and intends, we are informed, to retire to an estate which lies in a remote and nearly uninhabited part of the island."

Gerald read the above paragraph thrice, and weighed in his mind all the circumstances detailed in it. He sought in vain for further information upon the subject, being unable to discover any other newspaper, or even fragment of one, amongst the collection of manuscripts that lay before him. That which contained the account of the trial evidently had owed its preservation to accident, for it was torn and soiled, and covered with dust, and to all appearance had been used in wrapping up a parcel.

Gerald, the longer he reflected upon its contents, felt the more convinced of the identity of Mrs. Dittersdorf with the female prisoner, and of Mr. Marnledge with her unattractive paramour. A thousand corroborative circumstances crowded upon his mind, and the guilt of the parties seemed legible in their daily actions, looks, and gestures. He also remembered the allusion which Letitia had made respecting what

a woman was sometimes tempted to do, on the night on which Mr. Marnledge had entered her apartment, and the effect which her words had produced upon him. Though Gerald now felt his situation as an inmate of Sablegrove to be additionally revolting, he was not insensible to the increase of interest which it had acquired. The idea of being exposed, in an isolated place, to the machinations of such characters as Mr. Marnledge and Mrs. Dittersdorf, possessed a wild attractiveness, which went far to inspire that degree of firmness and caution which seemed requisite for self-protection under circumstances of the kind.

On the following morning, after breakfast, Gerald took occasion to remind Mr. Marnledge that he had hitherto found no opportunity of despatching letters to England, and requested that he would devise means to enable him to do so. Mr. Marnledge answered that such a thing was out of his power, and that the delay of another week or two could be of little consequence. Gerald left him, highly incensed at his indifference and apparent duplicity, and went to his usual duty upon the plantation. Here another irritat-

ing circumstance occurred. He was about to speak to one of the negroes, when the overseer, advancing towards him, said that it was against the rules of the estate to talk to the slaves while at work, or indeed at any other time, and that Mr. Marnledge had the previous day given express orders that none of them were to be allowed to hold communication with any European excepting himself. Gerald perceived something both mysterious and alarming in this intimation, and he began to suspect that treachery was intended; but he felt utterly unable to imagine what object Mr. Marnledge could have, either in detaining him at Sablegrove, or denying him an opportunity of sending letters to England; and it seemed likely that the interdiction laid upon the negroes referred to Letitia rather than to himself. At all events something was going forward, and it behoved him to keep on his guard, and likewise to warn another person to do the same.

On returning to the house in the evening, he found Miss Everhard sitting in the recess of one of the windows of the dining room, and engaged in needle-work. He immediately approached

her, saying, "Did you bear any resemblance to the other members of this family, I should not venture to address you, without first obtaining permission to that effect; but I have a flattering presentiment that Miss Everhard has no intention to exalt herself by looking with contempt upon the lowly Gerald Berens."

Letitia smiled faintly, and said, "You are perfectly correct in your surmises. One would think that, in a solitude like Sablegrove, those forms and restraints which belong to society, in the populous parts of this island, might be dispensed with. I perceive that you are displeased at the reserve with which you are treated by Mr. Marnledge and Mrs. Dittersdorf; but, believe me, they merely adhere to a custom prevalent over the whole of the West Indies,—that of maintaining, in strict, though relative, subordination, every individual included in the domestic and agricultural establishment, necessary to carry on the business of an estate."

"All this is very well in the abstract," returned Gerald, "but I think that some indulgence might be shewn to me who have been forced to accept my present situation by the dis-

asters of shipwreck. Perhaps, however, Mr. Marnledge supposes that I am an impostor, or an adventurer, characters which I believe are considered synonymous in most parts of the world, and that therefore I form a proper object for ill treatment. I only hope that Sablegrove has more attractions in your eyes than it has in my own."

"Alas!" cried Letitia, "can you for a moment suppose that I am happy here, or that this is a proper abode for me?" then apparently checking herself, she contined, "I am an orphan, and have no choice of residence. My father died very poor, more than a year ago, and left me to the care of Mr. Marnledge, who at that time lived in the neighbourhood of St. Thomas's, but shortly after removed to this estate. But who can say from a few days' experience, that a place is agreeable or the reverse? We often find things to meliorate our lot where we least expected them; but oh! how much oftener are we subjected to trials and miseries which never entered into our anticipations, and which are unknown to and unsuspected by those around us!"

"That is a terrible fate," returned Gerald, "and to be sincere with you, I have ominous fears that both of us are likely to be subjected to it ere long. Forgive me if I tell you that I know much more of how you are circumstanced here than you yourself can have any idea of; but to afford you assistance when you require it is my determined purpose; and I lay courage, honour, and secrecy at your feet, to be used as you may think fit."

"Thanks! thanks! unutterable thanks!" cried Letitia, with flowing tears. "It is long since I have heard words of kindness, except when they were coupled with insult—my situation here, indeed, is very dreadful, but why are your forebodings so gloomy?"

"The conduct of Mr. Marnledge," answered Gerald, "is the source of my fears. He seems determined to prevent my having any communication with any person or place, beyond the limits of Sablegrove, and has even interdicted my speaking to the negroes. He treats me as if I were entirely in his power, and seems to wish to discourage my entertaining any idea of quitting this place. Does no road lead from hence?

Which is the nearest estate or village? How is the produce of the plantation conveyed to market?"

"The path by which you were conducted hence, from the sea-shore," answered Letitia, "affords the only land egress that I know of; but the lower end of the saltmarsh terminates in a wide creek, about a mile long, and running into the sea. At particular times, the tide flows up considerably beyond this house, and then there is depth of water sufficient, even on the marsh, to admit of boats coming close to the plantation, and carrying down its produce to a vessel lying at the mouth of the creek. This, however, is done only once a-year, and there are no inhabitants near any part of the route."

"Abhorred spot! fit asylum for vice," cried Gerald. "Innocence and purity like yours, in such a place, are like a rose buried amongst dust and ashes.—And Mr. Marnledge is actually your guardian! But you have said nothing of Mrs. Dittersdorf."

"What do you expect me to say of *her*?" replied Letitia, faintly. "Have you not seen her, and been in her company, as well as myself?

She is a widow, and came to superintend Mr. Marnledge's domestic establishment, soon after we had got settled here. But hush! some one approaches. No more of this at present."

A few nights subsequent to this conversation, Gerald, when about to go to bed, heard the venetians of one of his windows distinctly shaken three times in succession. As there was no wind stirring, he could not imagine how the noise had been occasioned, but on its recurring, he threw open the frame and looked out. A black and shapeless object appeared upon the ground, within a few yards of him; at first remaining motionless for a few moments, and then gradually evolving itself, and assuming something like a human form. It then advanced, and on its coming within the range of the light transmitted through the window, Gerald recognized Unda, the old negress, whom he had assisted out of the salt-marsh. She motioned that he should be silent, and approaching close to the wall, whispered, "Have you received your things?"

"What things?" returned Gerald. "I have received nothing from any quarter since I came to Sablegrove."

"I suspected as much," said Unda; "you do not know, then, that some of your trunks, which have been saved from the wreck, were brought here four mornings since? The six seamen that set off in the boat, were obliged to come back two or three days after they went away, on account of having broken their boat against the rocks. They staid near Brooma's hut while repairing her, and in the mean time many things from the ship floated on shore, and among others, several trunks and boxes, which they said belonged to you. They gave these in charge to Brooma, and directed him to bring them here, and deliver them to you, which he did; but Mr. Marnledge took charge of them when they arrived, and said that you should have them, as soon as you returned from the plantation."

"This is important news, indeed, Unda," replied Gerald, "and many thanks for it; but who told you that my trunks had been brought here? Do you know if the seamen have gone from the coast yet?"

"I had the whole story from Brooma himself," answered Unda, "after Mr. Marnledge

had taken the things from him, and given him two dollars, and as much more to other three negroes that came along with him. The sailors went off again as soon as they had repaired their boat. But oh, master, do not say that I told you any thing about this business, for punishment, and perhaps ruin to me and mine, would follow. You see that I am obliged to come at night, lest I should be seen speaking to you."

"Fear not," replied Gerald, "you may depend upon my secrecy. I hope to be able to reward you for the risk you have run for my sake. If you learn any thing more that concerns me don't neglect to let me hear it as soon as possible."

Unda retired, and Gerald closed the window. He had now received direct evidence of Mr. Marnledge's treacherous intentions, though he was still unable to discover, or even surmise, what his purposes were. Gerald thought it almost certain that, of the many articles of his property which Unda described as having been brought to Sablegrove, the trunk containing the documents relative to his estates would form one. But he perceived that if Mr. Marnledge was

determined to retain the things in his own possession, it would be extremely difficult for him to recover them, as there was no evidence to prove that they had been delivered, except that of the negroes from the coast, whom he would, of course, take measures to keep out of the way, lest they should have any communication upon the subject with Gerald himself. The latter had no idea of taxing Mr. Marnledge with duplicity, or even giving any hint that he was acquainted with it, till he had acquired some idea of his intentions respecting himself, and also secured the means of quitting Sablegrove without his assistance or co-operation.

Gerald, next morning, on meeting the usual party at the breakfast table, easily perceived that something of a peculiar kind had recently occurred. Letitia looked very pale, agitated, and unhappy. Mrs. Dittersdorf seemed even more gloomy and dissatisfied than usual, and often cast indignant glances upon Mr. Marnledge, who appeared to suffer an embarrassment which he in vain attempted to conceal. But the most remarkable change in the manners of the two latter individuals,

respected Gerald himself, whom they now treated with a degree of attention and respect which formed a strong contrast with the studied reserve which they had always hitherto assumed towards him. Both of them occasionally addressed their conversation to him, and invited him to partake of the dishes that stood near them; but Gerald easily perceived that they were not acting in concert, or according to previous and mutual agreement, for each appeared to view the behaviour of the other with surprise, and to be at a loss to account for the motives which dictated it. Under different circumstances, an exhibition of this kind might have afforded amusement; but Gerald was too much absorbed by the embarrassing situation of his own affairs to attend to things of inferior interest.

On his return from the plantation in the evening, he perceived Miss Everhard strolling among the shrubbery in the neighbourhood of the house. He joined her, and she seemed pleased that he did so; and, after a few efforts at general conversation, asked whether Sablegrove was becoming more agreeable to him.

"Alas, no;" returned Gerald, "the reverse is the case. Indeed, circumstances have occurred which are likely much to abridge the period of my residence here. Things must soon come to a crisis between Mr. Marnledge and myself."

"Since it is so," cried Letitia, "I feel emboldened to request your protection and assistance. Mr. Marnledge has long persecuted me with his addresses, which I have invariably repelled with horror. This morning his conduct became absolutely insulting. He threatens me in various ways, and I am now distracted with the most terrible apprehensions. Alone, in this wild secluded spot, what can I do!—He regards no laws human or divine, and I am completely in his power. In short, I have resolved to quit Sable valley at all risks, and I am now endeavouring to form a plan of flight."

"Trust the execution of it to me," said Gerald. "We have many difficulties to contend with, for I suppose all the negroes are too much under the control of the overseer to lend us any assistance."

"There is one woman in whom I intend to confide," replied Letitia, "her name is Unda;

and she has the character of being an *Obi*, which gives her great influence over the others."

"What! is it *my* friend?" exclaimed Gerald; "I once afforded her some trifling aid, and her gratitude induced her to come secretly last night, and inform me that much of my shipwrecked property had been picked up on the beach, and sent here to be delivered to me. She suspected rightly that I had never received it, and it turns out that Mr. Marnledge has retained it in his own custody, but with what design I cannot tell."

"Inexplicable!" cried Letitia. "I thought that his baseness did not admit of any addition. But do you intend to submit quietly to be robbed in this way? From Mr. Marnledge's change of manner towards you, this morning, I fancied that you had acquired his confidence, and were on the best possible terms with him, though I acknowledge that I paid you no compliment in coming to a conclusion of the kind. Mrs. Dittersdorf, too, seemed to regard you with kindness. She has always been my enemy, and now is more resolutely so than ever, for it appears that she, this morning, overheard Mr. Marnledge making his detestable proposals to me. You will understand

enough when I tell you that she is jealous. What a pair! To have met them once, in the wide and busy world, would seem a punishment to any pure and generous mind;—but to be shut up with them in a solitude like this,—to be daily exposed to the malignity of the one, and the profligacy of the other, is surely a refinement of human misery."

"If Mr. Marnledge's attentions to you are so irritating to Mrs. Dittersdorf," remarked Gerald, "she surely would be rather inclined to favour your escape from hence."

"I do not know that," replied Letitia. "Some characters find such pleasure in tormenting others, that they willingly sacrifice their own advantage, when, by so doing, they are enabled to retain their victims within their control. Of late, Mrs. Dittersdorf has studied to render me as unhappy as possible, by a continued system of petty and agitating annoyances."

"Far be it from me," returned Gerald, "even to hint that you ought either to confide in her, or ask her assistance. To do one or the other would in your eyes be pollution:—Letitia Ever-

"I would not accept even life itself from the [illegible] reputed—murderess!"

"Do I hear aright?" exclaimed Letitia, "How can you know—"

"What picture is it that hangs in my apartment?" inquired Gerald.

"Thus of the deceased Mr. Dittersdorf," replied his companion.

"'Tis well," returned Gerald. "It was because it that I found the story of her crime, real or suspected. I knew that I could not be mistaken in her identity. Mrs. Dittersdorf, of Sablegrove, is then the Maria Dittersdorf that—"

"No more, no more!" cried Letitia. "God alone knows the heart. She may be innocent:—she was acquitted. We have been wandering from our subject. Let us resume it again. My idea is to get Unda to bribe one of the negroes to conceal a mule in the woods near this, and for me to proceed to the spot after sunset and ride during the whole night, which would bring me to a plantation in the morning. I have an acquaintance there, who would give me refuge in

the mean time. The distance is only twenty-four miles."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the approach of Mr. Marnledge; on seeing whom, Letitia went hastily towards the house, evidently much to his disappointment, and contrary to his expectations. On joining Gerald, he looked angrily at him, and they walked together in silence for some moments. "Mr. Berens," said he, at length, "I fear that you are inclined to forget yourself. I have for some time past remarked your attentions to Miss Everhard, who, you must be aware, is my ward, and therefore under my control and protection. You must not take advantage of her ignorance of the world."

"What do you mean to insinuate?" interrupted Gerald. "Is it that I am not fit company for Miss Everhard, or that I cherish unjustifiable designs upon her?"

"Both, both," replied Mr. Marnledge; "the subordinate situation which you hold here, does not admit of your putting yourself on an equality with any of the members of my family, unless by my express desire. As for your designs, I suppose they are such as enter into the heads of the

[illegible] of vain and inconsiderate young men, [illegible] them to seek to gain the affections of all the pretty women that fall in their way. But do not imagine that I am jealous, Mr. Berens! No, no, you must not flatter yourself in that way."

"Jealous!" reiterated Gerald, ironically, "I have too much respect for you to entertain an idea of the kind. The feelings of a guardian towards his ward are those of a father towards his daughter."

"Enough, young man," returned Mr. Marnledge, sharply. "These are subjects upon which I am not disposed to receive instruction from you. Meanwhile, I warn you not to force yourself again into Miss Everhard's company; and, as you seem to be in want of employment for the evening, I desire that you will in future muster the negroes at this time daily, and regularly make a report upon the subject to myself."

"That, I believe, is the overseer's duty," said Gerald, with as much calmness as he could assume.

"But I choose to make it *your* duty," replied Mr. Marnledge passionately, "and you will find that I am sovereign at Sablegrove."

So saying, he hurried away; while Gerald, looking after him, exclaimed to himself, "How well must I act my part! He evidently supposes, from my present unresisting submission, that he will find it no difficult matter to make a tool of me; but I only wait to obtain some knowledge of his schemes, when I will assume my real character, and free myself and Letitia from his tyranny, at all risks."

It now occurred to Gerald, that Unda, the Obi woman, who was so favourably disposed towards Letitia and himself, might be useful in the present crisis; and he set out for her hut, with the view of asking her advice respecting the best mode of secretly quitting Sablegrove. She lived on the opposite side of the saltmarsh, and at the edge of the forest which skirted it; and, though the path across the former was likely to prove both obscure and intricate in the twilight, Gerald determined to attempt the passage, aware that he should have no opportunity of doing so in daylight, without exciting observation and inquiry. Seizing a long bamboo, he stepped cautiously onwards, for the path was formed by large stones, trunks of trees, pieces of plank, and other

similar materials, placed upon the surface of the marsh, so as to afford dry and firm footing to passengers; but a recent high tide had washed away and displaced many of the stepping places, and Gerald knew that, if he missed one of them, he had every chance of sinking to a considerable and even dangerous depth in the mud.

The first intimation he had of the neighbourhood of Unda's hut, was from the barking of a dog. Having now crossed the marsh, he endeavoured to follow the sound, as well as possible; but soon got entangled among thickets of mangroves, from which he was a considerable time in extricating himself. At length he reached the outskirts of the forest, and directed his steps towards a particularly tall and shady tree, under the idea that Unda's habitation might be near it. Here his attention was attracted by a peculiar creaking of the branches overhead; and, on looking up, he perceived a large square body formed of bars of wood, swinging about in the wind. Within it was a dark coloured object of undefined shape, which moved with hollow rattlings from one side to another, according to the direction in which its barred inclosure was impelled by the blast.

Sometimes it would continue, as it were, recumbent for some moments, and then a gust of wind would swing the branches above, make it start up suddenly, and dash itself from one side to another. Gerald gazed intently upon this object and its aerial habitation, and gradually began to fancy that he could trace in the former some resemblance to a human figure. He raised himself on tiptoe to ascertain the point; and, at that instant, a hand and arm, shrunk, blackened, and sinewy, was thrust through the bars towards his face. He staggered back, uttering a loud exclamation.

Unda's hut was close by, and the sound of his voice brought her out with a lantern. "Whom have we here?" cried she. "Mr. Berens? It is indeed! Will your honour visit my poor house?"

"You may well be surprised to see me at this hour," said Gerald, as he entered her hut; "but I wish to speak with you! And you know enough of my affairs to understand that this must be done secretly for both our sakes. But what a solitary place you live in! And that extraordinary object swinging from the tree—what is it?"

"That," replied Unda, "is the body of a negro who murdered an overseer near this spot not many years ago. He was first hung, and then put into an iron cage, and tied up to yonder tree as an example to offenders. It seems strange to most people that I should live here, and I have got the name of being an *Obi* woman for it, which is just what I want. You white people laugh at the notion of an *Obi*, and so do I; but I keep up the trick, because it enables me to live quiet and easy, and do what I please. No negro dare molest me, and Mr. Marnledge himself is fond to keep on good terms with me, because he knows that I could frighten half the slaves off his estate, if I choose to do so. I am something better than I seem to be, for I can both read and write. My blessed mistress, who taught me these things, intended to take me to England with her, and to keep me there always; but she died before the time came for her to go home, and I was left upon the estate, and sold along with my fellow slaves. But my knowledge made me superior to them, and when purchased by Mr. Marnledge and brought to Sablegrove, I resolved to take up my present trade; and, if I cannot perform en-

chantments, at least I never did any harm, by pretending to have a power of the kind."

"The situation of your house," returned Gerald, "is well calculated to frighten people away. But I see that you have too much sense to be terrified by a skeleton. I have not come here to ask you to set the *Obi* for any one, but to inquire how I can best find my way from Sablegrove to the nearest plantation."

"Aha!" returned Unda, "I thought you would not remain here long. Well, your question is not so easily answered as you may think. You could not go from hence alone, without losing yourself in the woods, and where you will find a guide I know not; for I suppose, from your coming to me, that Mr. Marnledge has refused to give you one."

"I have not informed him that I intend to quit Sablegrove," answered Gerald, "nor have I decided when my departure is to take place, but I wish to secure the means of effecting it as soon as possible."

"Are you going to allow Mr. Marnledge to keep your property?" inquired Unda. "I not only know that he has got it, as I told you be-

fore, but can point out where it is to be found. I think I could contrive how you might obtain a sight of it, and even, perhaps, carry some of it away."

"For Heaven's sake, instruct me how," cried Gerald; "all of it that I am anxious to get into my possession lies in small bulk."

"I promise to do all I can to assist you," replied Unda. "Two nights hence, you shall hear more. In the mean time, I will try to procure a guide to shew you the way to the next plantation."

Satisfied with these assurances, Gerald, after a little more conversation, bade Unda good night, and retraced his steps across the marsh, and reached the house, just as the family were sitting down to supper, and without his absence from the plantation having been observed by any one.

CHAPTER III.

Gerald had for some days been looking for an individual calculated to assist him in the execution of any plans which he might form, but without success. He found no opportunity of addressing any of the negroes in private, besides being unwilling to run the risk of confiding in persons so completely under the influence and control of Mr. Marnledge and the overseer. All the domestics at Sablegrove were either very young or very old, and, therefore, incapable of making themselves useful to Gerald, however much they might be inclined to do so. Many a time, both on the estate and in the house, had he been on the point of asking one of the slaves to carry a letter, secretly, to the nearest European resident, or to conduct him to the abode of such; but prudence had hitherto always checked him, lest his having made a proposal of the kind should come to the knowledge of Mr. Marn-

ledge, and be the means of making him redouble his vigilance, to prevent communication with any place beyond Sablegrove.

One morning, while in this state of hesitation and uncertainty, he received a summons from Mr. Marnledge to attend him in private. The latter, at first, made some inquiries relative to what was going on upon the plantation, and then addressed Gerald thus:—" I perceive, Mr. Berens, that your present situation is not congenial to your taste; and how should it be so, considering that you arrived in the country with very flattering prospects? Now, I am anxious to improve your lot, and indeed to put you, as it were, upon a level with myself; but this cannot be done, unless you willingly accede to the conditions which I shall immediately propose to you."

" Pardon my interrupting you," returned Gerald, " but you seem entirely to mistake my views. My residence here, it is to be hoped, will be of temporary duration; and there is no chance of my remaining long enough at Sablegrove to derive any advantage from the plans which you appear to have formed for my benefit."

"What reason have you for expecting to quit us so soon?" said Mr. Marnledge. "Do you forget that you are a total stranger in the West Indies, and are destitute alike of funds, and of testimonials, to support those pretensions which induced you to set sail from England? For your own good, I wish to persuade you to abandon all idea of leaving Sablegrove for months to come. Has our hospitality already grown distasteful to you? However, though I have a right to expect some return for the shelter which I have afforded you in your misfortunes, I feel so anxious to make you comfortable, that I shall not exact from you even those trivial duties which you have hitherto been in the habit of reluctantly performing, should I find you disposed to concur in my plans, and to assist me in putting them into execution."

"I will not make any promise," replied Gerald, "until I have ascertained the nature of your purposes."

"The communication which I have to make is of a delicate character," returned Mr. Marnledge, with affected embarrassment. "You must be aware in what relation I stand towards Mrs.

Dittersdorf, and of the sentiments which Miss Everhard's virtues and attractions have awakened in my bosom. To come to the point at once, I am anxious to have a wife in place of a companion; though, in disencumbering myself of the latter, I intend to pay due attention to her feelings, and to provide for her as well as possible. You will perceive that Mrs. Dittersdorf stands in the way of my union with Letitia, in a double sense. Her affection for me leads her to wish that our connection should continue uninterrupted, while Miss Everhard views her as a dangerous rival, who will be likely to exercise an undue influence over me, even after our marriage, and perhaps afford cause for jealousy, on points of vital importance to domestic happiness. I have thus a complicated and a delicate part to act; for ah! Mr. Berens, it is often very difficult to please one woman, let alone two. Some people might say that I act unjustly, in endeavouring to get rid of Mrs. Dittersdorf; but we are not bound by any tie, human or divine, and of late, our tastes have ceased to assimilate in that degree which constitutes the charm of male and female companionship."

Gerald had listened to Mr. Marnledge thus far in silent astonishment. The baseness of his sentiments, his cool manner of avowing them, his affected style of delivery, and his monstrous presumption in supposing himself agreeable to Letitia, formed so startling and unexpected an exhibition of character, as at first to suggest the idea that a burlesque was intended. Above all, the thin veil of sentiment which Mr. Marnledge attempted to throw over his profligacy, communicated a tinge of the ludicrous to the whole of his communication, and rendered both himself and its tenor additionally repulsive and disgusting.

"And are you really serious in telling me that Miss Everhard is disposed to marry you," inquired Gerald, "and that Mrs. Dittersdorf forms the only obstacle to your union?"

"I have every reason to believe so," replied Mr. Marnledge. "Letitia does not avow any partiality for me; but she is timid, and must be treated with a gentle violence and coercive persuasiveness, which I well know how to employ, and which seldom fail to succeed in cases of the kind."

Gerald smiled contemptuously, and said, "Had avowals, such as you have now made, proceeded from the lips of a young man, they would have been calculated to excite pity and regret; but coming, as they now do, from one of advanced years, they cannot be listened to without disgust and aversion. The depth of your folly, sir, is exceeded only by the egregiousness of your self-conceit."

"What is all this I hear?" interrupted Mr. Marnledge, angrily. "My purpose at present, Mr. Berens, is not to seek advice or admonition from you. However, I am willing to excuse the intemperance of your language, from knowing the cause of your excited feelings. You have had the presumption to endeavour to make yourself agreeable to Miss Everhard, and are naturally annoyed to think that all attempts of the kind will henceforth be prohibited; but your present distress and irritation afford a proper punishment for your forwardness, and I hope that due contrition may follow. But I must now explain how you are concerned in the family arrangements which I have disclosed. It is my wish that you should take Mrs. Dittersdorf off my

hands, and thus pave the way to my early marriage with Letitia. Your reward shall be ample, and such as you have at present no conception that it is in my power to bestow. What do you say to this?"

"Take Mrs. Dittersdorf off your hands!" repeated Gerald. "I can hardly breathe. Marry Mrs. Dittersdorf! Why—"

"No, no, no, young man," cried Mr. Marnledge, "you need not be so virtuous. I don't want you to marry her; make a companion of her, as I have done, or any thing else you please. Only withdraw her from my protection and from Sablegrove, so that she may be removed out of my way; you shall have the means of doing this, and when once it has been effected, you may either desert her, or attach yourself to her, as happens to prove most agreeable and convenient."

"Now I begin to understand you," exclaimed Gerald. "What a detestable scheme! Why, Mr. Marnledge, I must surely appear a fool in your eyes; for I am not aware of having done any thing, since I came to Sablegrove, that could lead you to suppose that I would prove a useful co-

adjutor in your iniquities. But do not again mistake my character. Your proposals are equally infamous and disgusting, and I will not listen to a repetition of them."

"Do not be so impetuous," replied Mr. Marnledge. "My proposals may be disagreeable to you, but the arguments which I have to back them will prove the reverse. Listen then. Most of your shipwrecked property is now in my possession, and, among other things, the documents relative to your estates. These shall be the price of your compliance with my wishes. Accomplish Mrs. Dittersdorf's permanent removal from Sablegrove, and I will give you the means of establishing your rights. When you have made the requisite arrangements for the disposal of your property, you can embark for England, and things will then be the same with you as if we had never even seen each other."

"That may be your opinion," returned Gerald; "and I will not attempt to combat it. I perceive that I have no chance with you, unless I become as knowing a villain as yourself. Your offers are tempting, but they will not allure me to commit a degrading action; and I think you

have made a mistake in telling me that you have robbed me, as it gives me such insight into your character as must prevent my placing any confidence in your word."

"This is visionary language," said Mr. Marnledge. "I conceive myself fully entitled to employ, for my own benefit, the advantages which Fortune may throw in my way; and I should recommend you to follow the same system. I have no desire to appropriate your property to myself, as you may easily discover, by my offering to restore it to you on defined and reasonable terms. But, Mr. Berens, before we proceed further in this affair, let me advise you to be cautious how you decide. Consider your situation. Who except myself can relieve your present embarrassments? Here you are, shut out from society, and unable to obtain assistance from any one. If you have any regard for your personal safety, you never will attempt to depart from hence, without my knowledge and permission. I do not propose to detain you here by force, for that might lead to disagreeable consequences, and would be unnecessary, the situation of Sablegrove offering sufficient natural impediments to your

escape; but I wish to impress upon your mind the difficulties with which you would have to contend, and which, in the rashness and impetuosity of youth, you might consider trivial, and likely to be easily overcome. For the present, farewell."

The clouds which had hitherto involved Gerald, and obscured from him the real circumstances of his situation, had now rolled away; and he perceived that he stood upon a pinnacle from which he could not move without descending a precipice of one kind or another. His former undefined fears seemed like animating prospects, when contrasted with the deadening certainties of the present, and the gloomy and encumbering difficulties with which he was now surrounded. He looked in vain for some tangible point which he could catch hold of, or some accessible path which he might pursue, in order to extricate himself from the evils that threatened him on every side. All was black and hopeless; and, after several hours of reflection, he found himself as undecided as ever respecting the line of conduct which it behoved him to pursue.

For some days previous to the conversation

above detailed, Mrs. Dittersdorf had treated Gerald with a degree of politeness and attention which he was unable to account for; and he would now have supposed that she was in league with Mr. Marnledge, to effect the separation which the latter so anxiously desired, had not various circumstances convinced him that she would be violently opposed to any measure of the kind, particularly if it was intended to lead to the marriage of Letitia Everhard with her protector. However, his doubts upon this subject were soon to be dispelled.

In the evening, after supper, Mr. Marnledge went to his office, remarking that he was about to employ himself in overlooking and arranging the accounts of the estate for the last quarter, and giving orders that no one should disturb him. Mrs. Dittersdorf and Letitia left the room about the same time, and Gerald began to walk backwards and forwards in the veranda in front of the house. He had not continued long there, when a little negro girl came to him, and whispered that Mrs. Dittersdorf wished for his company in her own apartment. He followed the messenger, though not without hesitation,

and was conducted into a small and neatly furnished room, in which he found the lady prepared to receive him.

She was seated on a couch, and before her stood a table with fruits and sweet-meats upon it, and a rich cut crystal decanter full of water. At one end of the apartment was a small chamber organ, and a mahogany cabinet, containing music books. Several branched lights projected from the wall, and the place had an air of ornament and even luxury, which was completely at variance with the style of the other parts of the mansion. Rosewood work-boxes, elegantly bound books, vinaigrette bottles, and various little articles, indicative of female taste and refinement, lay about the room, though in that neglected and disarranged way which shewed that they had lost their value and interest in the eyes of their possessor. These things, and the greater part of the furniture, seemed to have belonged to her during the lifetime of her deceased husband; and she probably had brought them to Sablegrove, when she first became one of its inmates. Mrs. Dittersdorf wore an agitated and dissatisfied look, and she rose to receive Gerald with an air

of embarrassed gaiety, which was not at all attractive or becoming.

"Mr. Berens," said she, "we must get better acquainted. Do not feel offended at the reserve with which I have hitherto treated you. Being a total stranger to me when you arrived at Sablegrove, you could not expect to be received with confidence all at once. We West Indian ladies are obliged to be particular in this respect, for the customs of the country demand it. I am happy to perceive that Mr. Marnledge reposes the highest trust in you, and there is now no reason why I should not do the same. I believe you are fond of music?"

"I am," replied Gerald, "and the pleasure I have derived from your performances, imperfectly as I have heard them, has been increased by my surprise at there being such a thing as music at Sablegrove."

"Alas," said Mrs. Dittersdorf, "I fear that you consider us rather uncivilized here, and doubtless we are so in some respects; but, when the heart is engaged and interested, external things become of little consequence to one's happiness. Mr. Berens, I should act insincerely

were I to say that my sole motive in asking you to visit me to-night was to enjoy your conversation. I am an unfortunate woman, and require your assistance."

"Beware lest you deceive yourself, madam," said Gerald. "What can I do for you, or for any one? I am a mere cypher here. I have no liberty of action in my present circumstances, therefore, you had better not honour me with your confidence, until you have ascertained that my services can be available."

"This advice sounds harshly," returned Mrs. Dittersdorf, "but it is probably dictated by a distrust of your own capacities; however, do not fear, you can easily accomplish all that I desire, provided you have the inclination. I dare say you are acquainted with the nature of the connection existing between Mr. Marnledge and myself. The impossibility of obtaining the rites of the church here, has alone prevented our being legally married. But would you believe that Miss Everhard, taking advantage of this, has, for some time past, been endeavouring to cause dissension between us, and, in short, to displace me in Mr. Marnledge's affections."

"Incredible!" cried Gerald. "Be assured that you are scandalously deceived. I would stake my life on Miss Everhard's innocence of what you accuse her. How can you believe any thing so revolting and absurd?"

"Revolting I acknowledge it to be," returned Mrs. Dittersdorf; "but the absurdity of the thing is not so apparent. In short, the girl wishes to marry her guardian, and I suspect that he, influenced by her wiles, is not disinclined to the match. When I came under Mr. Marnledge's protection, it was understood between us that he should provide for me handsomely, at his death, for he is very rich. Now Miss Everhard, besides depriving me of his affection, is likely to be the means of throwing me destitute, for she certainly will not advise him to make any provision for me in the event of their marriage, and I shall then either be turned out of the house, or allowed to remain in the family in the character of a humble dependant, should the outrageous purity of Letitia submit to such a contamination."

"I cannot agree with you in drawing those conclusions," replied Gerald, "because I to-

tally disbelieve the grounds upon which they are formed. But pray tell me what you expect me to do for you?"

"Ah, Mr. Berens," answered Mrs. Dittersdorf, "I find that you are very lukewarm in my cause; but, since I have confided so much to you, I may as well disclose every thing. I hope you are not over fastidious, or you will be inclined to accuse me of indelicacy, when you learn the favour that I am about to ask of you. Letitia Everhard is an insipid spiritless girl, and possesses no attractions calculated to win the heart of a discerning man; and I believe that Mr. Marnledge admires her more for her apparent innocence and modesty than any thing else, and that his delusion would cease, were he to learn that those qualities are merely hypocritical and assumed ones. Now, I wish that you would undertake to inform him upon this point."

"Hear me, madam," interrupted Gerald, rising from his seat. "If the service which you require of me is to consist in inventing falsehoods respecting Miss Everhard, it is unnecessary for you to proceed to any further explanation."

"Is this romance or affectation?" cried Mrs. Dittersdorf, laying hold of his arm. "Why should you be the champion of Miss Everhard? Have I no claim upon your regard?—Be seated, and listen patiently. What I have to propose is, simply, that you should tell Mr. Marnledge, confidentially, that you have seduced Letitia, since your arrival here. Should he affect to doubt your word, I can bring forward several persons, who will give such evidence upon the subject as may prove convincing; and when he once believes the story, I feel satisfied that the young lady will lose all charm in his estimation."

"You have said quite enough, Mrs. Dittersdorf," returned Gerald; "at least one result of this interview must meet your approbation; which is, the conviction I feel that Mr. Marnledge and yourself are well adapted for each other, and that I may conscientiously use every effort to prevent the separation which you anticipate and seem to dread so much. But in doing so you must allow me to choose my own means."

At this moment the door of the apartment was suddenly opened, and Mr. Marnledge enter-

ed hurriedly, with every appearance of anger and astonishment. "How is this, madam?" cried he, addressing Mrs. Dittersdorf. "I was not aware that Mr. Berens had the honour of being on such intimate terms with you. I have, indeed, observed something like love-making between you of late, and this, I suppose, is not the first private interview which he has enjoyed. The time is well chosen; for you may recollect that I mentioned this evening that I should be busily employed in my office till a late hour."

"My dear sir, you entirely deceive yourself," returned Mrs. Dittersdorf. "I had a small favour to ask of Mr. Berens, and invited him here for that purpose."

"Women are fertile in explanations," replied Mr. Marnledge contemptuously: "but I am not easily imposed upon. Since you have degraded yourself, by keeping up a secret intercourse with a plantation clerk, I give you full permission to make it a public one, as soon as you please. Madam, I renounce all claim to you in future. You must now look to Mr. Berens for protection."

"Are you distracted?" exclaimed Mrs. Dit-

tersdorf. Is it jealousy that makes you rave thus? I am innocent of what you accuse me. Who has been deceiving you with falsehoods? I, and I alone, am the injured person."

"Silence, silence," retorted Mr. Marnledge, "you are beneath my resentment. Ha, Mr. Berens! *you* do not attempt to say any thing in self-defence. Well, well, make the most of your bargain. I envy your talents for intrigue. You are a dangerous man."

"Wretched liar!" cried Gerald. "What should *I* say? Were a good spirit to drop, by accident, into hell, do you suppose that it would endeavour to vindicate its innocence to the surrounding demons?"

"I thank you for the compliment," said Mr. Marnledge; "but it will not long remain an appropriate one, for I shall now bring an angel to witness your doings. He went to the door, and called out for Miss Everhard, several times, in a loud voice. Her chamber was but a few yards distant, and on hearing herself summoned she came out and looked around. Mr. Marnledge went forward, and seizing her hand, drew

her into Mrs. Dittersdorf's room, though she struggled to get free from his grasp.

"See here!" cried he; "I have made a discovery. Look at that guilty pair. Their criminal intimacy has this night ——"

"Believe him not, Letitia," interrupted Mrs. Dittersdorf. "How indeed can you, for I know that you have acted as a spy in this vile plot against my honour and character."

"Mr. Marnledge," said Letitia, "is this a subject for my ears, or a scene for my eyes? Abandoned and unfeeling yourself, do you suppose that I partake of your nature in any way? Sablegrove is becoming the seat of a refined wickedness, which must soon prove fatal to all who do not increase and relish its corruptions; as I am one of those, I shall take the liberty of retiring."

"Nay, you must hear all," cried Mr. Marnledge; "Mrs. Dittersdorf having bestowed her affections upon Mr. Berens, I intend to allow both of them to depart hence within a few days. Arrangements to that effect shall be made tomorrow."

Letitia darted from the room, and on Mr. Marnledge's attempting to detain her, Gerald seized him by one shoulder, and precipitated him to the opposite side of the chamber. On recovering himself, his rage was so great that he could not utter a word. He stood pale and trembling for some moments, and Gerald, perceiving his agitation, gave him a look of cool defiance, and walked away.

None of the parties met again that night. Gerald went to his room at the usual time, and opening one of the windows, cast many anxious looks towards the building in which Letitia lodged. Of the various painful impressions that arose from a review of the events of the evening, none was so acute as his fear that she might give credit to Mr. Marnledge's scandalous assertions respecting Mrs. Dittersdorf and himself. That very purity of mind which would go far to make Letitia disbelieve the tale, would also be likely to deter her from examining its probability, and the evidence upon which it rested. He was several times about to approach her window and endeavour to speak to her, but the dread of exciting observation, and occasioning new troubles

and perplexities, deterred him. About midnight, as he was about to lie down to sleep, he was roused by the appearance of Unda, who according to her promise had come to inform him where his shipwrecked things were deposited, and how he might obtain access to them. She stated that they had been placed in a small building on the bank of the salt-marsh, the door of which could easily be forced open, and that she was willing to conduct him to the spot any night that he might choose to appoint. Gerald thanked her for her fidelity and attention, and told her that the critical state of his affairs at that time did not admit of his immediately availing himself of her offer, but that he should send her intimation when circumstances favoured his doing so.

Next morning Gerald, on getting up, found several negroes stationed outside his apartment, and was told by one of them that Mr. Marnledge had placed them there, with orders to keep him a prisoner. Breakfast was brought to him by a female domestic at the usual time, but he could obtain no information from any quarter respecting what was going on in the family, or

what was likely to be his own fate. Resistance appeared to him useless, even had he possessed the means of making any; but having no arms to fight with, and no money to employ in bribing his attendants, he found that it would be best to remain passive till some opportunity for action presented itself. Had mere escape from confinement been desirable, he might easily have leaped out of a window, and eluded the negroes, whom he knew to be favourably disposed towards him, by concealing himself in the brushwood near the saltmarsh till night should enable him to proceed to the hut of Unda, upon whose assistance in furthering his progress he could safely depend. But he dismissed all idea of following so selfish a plan, and resolved to sacrifice every thing for the sake of Letitia, and to deliver her at all risks from the miseries of her present condition.

The day was passed without incident or interruption, except what arose from the bringing in of his dinner. Shortly after sunset, and before any light had been placed in his chamber, he heard a slight rustling noise at one of the windows, and the next moment saw a folded paper drop

on the floor. He opened it, and read as follows:—

"I feel no animosity towards you, although your presence in my chamber last night was productive of the most unlooked for and unfortunate result. But as I was the means of bringing you there, I cannot justifiably complain. Mr. Marnledge is in the highest degree exasperated at you, first on account of the violence you used against him, and next because he suspects that you have been trying to gain the affections of Letitia. His jealousy last night was, I am convinced, altogether affected, and was assumed for the purpose of bringing about a quarrel with myself, and eventually getting rid of me. It is fit that he should be punished for his deceit and inconstancy, and I hope, with your assistance, to do so in a most effectual manner, besides maintaining those rights of which I now run so much risk of being deprived. The hypocritical Miss Everhard does not deserve to escape my vengeance, but I intend to forgive her, because she has submitted to my will, which is, that she shall depart secretly from Sablegrove this night, and never return to it. You are to be the part-

ner of her flight. I hope you do not dislike her; for when she finds that Mr. Marnledge and his wealth are beyond her reach, she will probably manage to make you marry her. I cannot for a moment suppose that you will object to accompany her to-night. You seem to be unhappy, and would certainly be made much more so were you to remain any longer at Sablegrove. Besides, when Mr. Marnledge finds that Letitia and yourself have eloped together, he will not suspect me of having had any hand in effecting her removal, and will be so mortified by her desertion, that he will endeavour to forget her, and thus lead the way to my regaining my former influence over him. My scheme therefore is calculated to benefit every one of us. To-night when the moon sets, your prison doors shall be opened. Follow the person who does so, and ask no questions. I have arranged all things for your journey.

"MARIA DITTERSDORF."

Gerald was transported with delight at the contents of this note. The writer's plans seemed literally to have been dictated with a reference

to his own happiness, and every thing seemed so clear, plausible, and consistent, that he did not for a moment allow himself to suppose that any deception was intended, or that any of the arrangements could possibly miscarry.

The moon, being but a few days old, had risen long before sunset, and Gerald now anxiously watched her crescent descending towards the horizon, and at length saw the last verge of her disk disappear behind the trees. In about a quarter of an hour after, the door of his apartment was opened from the outside, and a muffled female came forwards and waved to him to follow her. He did so in silence: and they passed round the back of the house, stooping among the shrubbery, and directed their course towards the salt-marsh. The darkness was so great that Gerald had several falls, owing to the inequality of the ground, and the stumps of trees that projected above its surface; but his conductress met with no accidents of the kind, and seemed to proceed with perfect confidence, and an intimate knowledge of all the surrounding localities. At length they reached the outskirts of some low but thick forest, and here she stopped, and

drawing from under her cloak a lantern, removed the tin shade that enveloped it, and allowed the light to diffuse itself in front of her. This indeed was absolutely necessary, for the path leading through the wood was too intricate and full of obstructions to be traversed in a dark night, even by a person well acquainted with its sinuosities.

Gerald and his conductress now advanced as rapidly as the state of the ground would permit. A dank and pungent odour informed him that they were close to the salt-marsh, as also did the soil upon which they trod, for water sprang up round their feet at every step of their progress. On emerging from the trees, they found themselves on the very edge of the marsh, and Gerald's companion directed his attention to a small circular building, which stood in the midst of it, and about twenty yards off, and whispered,—"You will find Letitia there, and also instructions how to proceed when you gain the opposite shore. Look on me ere I say farewell." She withdrew some folds of linen that concealed her face, and Gerald saw Mrs. Dittersdorf standing

before him. "Hush! hush!" said she, perceiving that he was about to speak: "this is not a time for parley. I could trust none but myself to conduct you here in secrecy. I acted as Miss Everhard's guide to this very place about an hour ago. Prosperity attend you!" She wrapped herself again in her disguise, and hastening away, soon disappeared among the trees.

Gerald, on taking a second glance at the building, discovered that it was one which had been erected for the manufacture and collection of salt from the marsh many years before, and soon after abandoned in consequence of its not having answered the purpose required. He also perceived, to his great satisfaction, that it exactly corresponded with the description given by Unda, of the place in which Mr. Marnledge had deposited his property: not that he expected to be able to recover his papers, for the other was too cautious not to have withdrawn them, and lodged them securely under his own eye; but as the trunks contained various articles of value, Gerald resolved to possess himself of such of

those as were most portable, and most likely to prove useful upon his reaching an inhabited country.

A series of trunks of trees lay upon the surface of the marsh, and formed a sort of bridge leading to the building, which was surrounded with stagnant water a few inches in depth, and had a damp, dilapidated appearance, the external walls being marked with green patches, and studded with slimy fungous plants. Gerald advanced towards the building with a palpitating heart, for he neither could discover any light, nor hear the least sound, and he began almost to doubt if Letitia were actually there. But on reaching its supporting platform, he saw a white figure standing in the door-way, and next moment a well-known voice exclaimed in a soft and low tone,—"Is it Mr. Berens?"

"Letitia," replied he, "I am here, and congratulate you on your escape; you have nothing to fear now."

"Alas," said she, "do not be too confident. This is a dreary spot, and I have spent a miser-

able hour in its solitude, since the departure of the person who conducted me here."

"But tell me," returned Gerald, "how comes it that this has been made our place of rendezvous? Do you know what further means are to be used to ensure our escape?"

"Mrs. Dittersdorf arranged it so;" answered Letitia. "Two negroes will come here from the opposite side of the marsh, with a couple of mules for us, about two hours hence. The tide is now rising, and as it flows very high and deep in that part of the marsh, which lies between this house and Sablegrove, and which you have now crossed, it became necessary that we should advance thus far before the time of flood; for had we remained on yonder side of the marsh, our guides could not have approached us, on account of the depth of water, and the rapidity of the current. Hark how the waves are roaring! They will soon surround us, and when they have partially retired again, we may expect to see the mules here. Our destination is to be a small negro settlement upon the coast, and about ten miles distant. We shall there obtain a boat, and proceed to the

nearest plantation. I intend to take refuge with a female friend, who resides in the town of St. Thomas."

"And are we then to separate?" exclaimed Gerald. "No, Letitia, that must not be. If I have not hitherto dared to address you in the language of love and passionate admiration, it was because the hopelessness of my circumstances forbade my doing so; but now, in the prospect of establishing my rights——"

"Is this a time for such declarations?" returned Letitia. "Cease, cease; I cannot listen to you. Our fate is as yet too uncertain to admit of our entertaining any thoughts unconnected with the present."

"Forgive my warmth," said Gerald; "my feelings shall not again betray me."

They stood together in silence in the doorway, and looked anxiously across the marsh, the whole expanse of which, in front, and on both sides of the building, was now covered with water to a considerable depth. The ripplings of the advancing flood were distinctly heard, and the channel next Sablegrove, already described, had the appearance of a rapid river, the tide sweeping

through it with an eddying current and rushing noise. About three hundred yards below the building, a continuous body of water covered the whole width of the marsh, and heaved and undulated with a simultaneousness of motion, that indicated its fearful depth, and the controlling agitation and pressure of mighty floods connected with it, and extending beyond it. At intervals, a wreath of foam would flash into existence upon its dark surface, and progressing forwards for a few moments, suddenly disappear, as if it had shewn itself merely to give evidence that the mass of waters beneath it was not yet stayed in its advancing course. Now also the waves in the immediate vicinity of the building could be heard insinuating themselves under its foundations with regular sappings, and sometimes with a sudden shock, which made the walls quiver. A cold damp wind, loaded with spray, swept along in the direction of the marsh, and a haziness began to extend gradually from the horizon up the sky, first dimming the stars, and then, as it were, involving them in a dense and lustre-absorbing medium.

Letitia shuddered, and looked expressively to

wards Gerald. "This is a hideous scene," said he, "but it cannot continue. The waters must soon subside. Meanwhile, let me advise you to go within, lest you should suffer injury from the cold night air. It would be well if we had a light."

"Here are the materials for producing one," replied Letitia; "Mrs. Dittersdorf gave them to me, recommending, however, that I should not employ them unless it became necessary to do so. She probably was fearful that the appearance of a light here might excite observation at Sablegrove."

"There is no risk of that now," said Gerald; "I will therefore procure one without further delay. Do you remain here while I do so."

The tinder-box and lantern had been placed upon the sill of a small window in the lower part of the building, and Gerald, leaving Letitia in the door-way, went to procure them. He had scarcely advanced two steps, when he found himself up to the ancle in water; but he had presence of mind enough to conceal this alarming circumstance from his companion, and returning with the articles to the place where she stood, he soon

was successful in lighting a wax taper, though he knew that the immediate effect of this would be to shew her that the apartment was about to be inundated. But the necessity of devising means of preservation admitted of no delay or concealment of danger. Letitia, when she saw the light gleaming upon the sheet of water within the building, grew pale, and seemed at once to be struck with despair. "See," cried Gerald, "there is a wooden trap stair in one corner, which must lead to a room overhead. For what other purpose could it be placed in such a situation? We are safe. Let us ascend." Observing that she was too agitated and irresolute to be able to give an assent to what was proposed, he lifted her in his arms, and carrying her across the flooded apartment, placed her upon the lower steps of the trap stair already mentioned. He then mounted to the top, and found a small chamber there, as he had expected. Letitia seemed somewhat to revive on receiving intelligence of this, and with the assistance of Gerald, quickly took refuge in their newly discovered asylum. Narrow as its limits were, the combined light of the lantern afforded but an in-

distinct view of its interior, which appeared at some former period to have been used as a kind of lumber room, for several empty boxes and casks were piled together in one corner. The roof was so low that Gerald could scarcely stand upright, and the planks composing the floor had wide chinks between them, through which the water below was distinctly visible. The room was oppressively close, for it had no window, and a cloud of warm and noxious vapour seemed to hang suspended under the ceiling.

It was here that Gerald and Letitia seated themselves, in anxious anticipation of their hour of deliverance from a situation so gloomy and appalling. But the dashing of the waters still continued to sound in their ears with increasing loudness, and convinced them that the tide had not yet attained its greatest height. Gerald attempted to engage Letitia's attention by conversation, but the elements without seemed clamourous to be heard in preference, and raged with a vindictive fierceness that claimed the undivided regard of the listener. "We cannot be in any danger," said he, "for you may rest assured, Letitia, that this building was not erected here until

it had been ascertained that the highest possible tides would neither overflow it, nor endanger its foundations. The floor below is now covered with water, in consequence of its having sunk at least a foot lower than it originally was. But now it occurs to me, that I ought to examine this place more minutely. You may remember my having told you that Mr. Marnledge had obtained possession of my shipwrecked property. Unda informed me a few days ago that she believed it was deposited here, which seems likely enough, as he must have been unwilling to bring it to the dwelling-house, lest it might fall under my observation, or that of any other person."

Gerald now took the lantern from the ground, and began to examine every part of the room. The light accidentally fell upon its remotest corner, and he was startled by the appearance of a human countenance. He rushed forwards, and found that he had not been deceived. Upon a heap of dry maize leaves, and covered with a wretched dark-coloured rug, lay a female figure. Her countenance shewed that she was a negress, more by its form and expression, than by its complexion, for its natural blackness had disap-

peared, and was succeeded by a clayey whiteness, the result of a hideous disease. Nearly all the hair of her head and eyebrows had fallen off, and her swollen lids, rendered rigid by a tropical malady, refused to close over the lustreless and pellucid eyeballs beneath. After many efforts, attended with a convulsive heaving of the breast, she spoke some words in a hoarse and suppressed tone, at the same time stretching out a deformed arm and shrunken hand towards Gerald, and offering a slip of paper which she held feebly in the latter. He involuntarily drew back, but the spectral being pronounced something that sounded like the name of Miss Everhard; and he made an effort to overcome his feelings of shuddering repugnance, and seized the paper. It was superscribed "To Letitia." "What horrible mystery is here?" cried Gerald. "Speak, monster! How came you in possession of this? Ominous messenger, explain whom or what you are. Back, back, Letitia, this is not a sight for your eyes."

"When will this night of horrors have a close?" cried she, wildly, and at the same time

advancing towards him. "To whom do you address yourself? What mean those fearful words which you have just uttered." At this moment she discovered the negro woman, and springing backwards, with a faint scream, she placed herself behind Gerald. "Look here," said he, "this billet is for you; will you read it now? Surely its contents cannot partake of the hideousness of the bearer of it."

Letitia received the note with a blanched cheek, and kneeling down close to the lantern, began to peruse it. A few moments sufficed for that. The paper dropped from her hands. She uttered a long despairing shriek, and sunk on the floor, without sense or motion. A sympathetic shock seemed to agitate the frame of the negro woman. She threw an imploring and terror-struck glance upon Gerald, as if fearful of immediately falling a victim to his resentment, and then gibbering some words with vehemence, folded up her limbs into the smallest possible compass, like a wild animal, and shrunk trembling under her rug.

Gerald raised Letitia, and supported her in a

sitting posture against himself. He then lifted the note which lay at his feet, and read as follows:—

"As we are about to part without the chance of ever meeting again, I cannot let you go, without bestowing upon you a legacy which will serve to retain me long and constantly in your remembrance. A view of the bearer of this note will explain the nature of my bequest much more impressively than a pen can do. She is expiring under the malignant leprosy of this island. Contagion, as you well know, inevitably arises from breathing, even for a short time, the same atmosphere as the diseased person. You will necessarily spend the greater part of the night in the room where my messenger now lies. You are healthy, young, and beautiful. A few weeks will render you diseased, loathsome, and prematurely old; but I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you so, for a regard for my own safety must prevent my again meeting or having any communication with you. Console yourself with the idea that you are not the first who has fallen a victim to my revenge. Farewell for ever!

"MARIA DITTERSDORF."

Letitia soon awakened from the trance into which she had fallen. "Are we indeed on board the boat;" said she faintly. "How rapidly we are going through the water! The motion makes me giddy." Gerald leaned over her in silent despair, and felt no wish to recall her wandering fancy to the dreadful realities around her, until he had considered what it would be best to do. "Ah!" continued she, with a deep-drawn sigh, "I perceive that I have been in a dream. Did I faint, or how was it? Oh! now, now, I remember every thing. There! there! that hideous form! Was any one ever before subjected to such a fate as mine? Why did not Mrs. Dittersdorf poison me at once?"

"Detested wretch!" cried Gerald, rushing towards the negro woman, "who brought you here? Did you come yourself? Did you know that we were to pass the night in this house? Answer me; lest in the fury of the moment I dash your hated life from your loathsome body."

"Oh, spare me," exclaimed she, stretching out her hands. "I was left here many days ago by the orders of the overseer. When a slave takes my disease, he is forsaken and avoided by

every one. I cannot walk without help. They brought me to this building, because it is an out-of-the-way place, where I should not be likely to infect any person. But Mrs. Dittersdorf must have known of it, for she sent that letter here, ordering me to give it to the young lady or your honour, after you had been half an hour in the room."

"What a hell-born plot!" exclaimed Gerald. "But its success is not yet inevitable. Letitia, cease to despair; our sole chance of safety depends upon the removal of this spectre of contagion. She must be forced to go below."

"Impossible!" cried Letitia, aroused by this declaration; "humanity shudders at such an idea. If removed from hence she must perish."

"Aye, aye, I acknowledge it," returned Gerald, with desperation; "but I also call to witness the eternal Heavens, that I seek not to do such a thing for my own sake. It is to save you that I determine to sacrifice her. Speak not again! She shall be precipitated down the trap-stairs. Woman! fiend! fiend! prepare to struggle with the waters beneath!"

"It must not be," screamed Letitia, inter-

placing himself between Gerald and the negro woman. "It is too late. Nothing can avail us now. I would not purchase perfect exemption from all the ills of life upon such terms. Demon, I contract you."

"Mercy! mercy!" cried the negress. "Fling me! Do not kill me. I never wished to harm you. I am weak and miserable, but I may yet live many weeks." Gerald having now approached close to her, seized the corners of her rug, intending to wrap her up in its folds and fling her away. But by a desperate effort, she extricated herself, and falling forwards, seized hold of his hands. Horror-struck by her touch, he sprung backwards, and stood gazing upon her in silence. Her respiration was thick and hurried, from the exertion which she had undergone, and she croaked out in tones of smothered anger and reproach,—"Why did you come near me? Why did you touch me? Keep far from the lady!"

"Keep far from the lady!" repeated Gerald. "Yes, yes, by touching you I become excommunicated. Ha, ha, ha! I have now nothing more to fear. I dare not approach you, Letitia.

While trying to save your life with one hand, I should be stabbing you with the other. Howl away, winds! Rise waters! Tumble down walls, and bury us altogether! Out, out, light! If you are a spark from heaven you have nothing to do here. Death, darkness, and despair are congenial!" He dashed the lantern into fragments, and the obscurity became so great, that no one could see another.

"Peace, peace," cried Letitia. "My senses are failing me. This house is surely rocking from its base. Over my head I see a vast bright shining dome, within which a mighty bell swings backwards and forwards with intolerable clangings. Oh, Gerald, is this imagination? Am I here alone? In vain I stretch out my hands. I can find nothing to hold by; and the raging tide will soon sweep me away!"

"Will no one give me a drop of water?" hoarsely muttered Jacoba, the negro woman. "My breath gets tight. Support my head,—I am dying."

"No, no, live on!" exclaimed Gerald, furiously; "live on, I say, for our instruction, who are doomed to die like you. Tell us when your

agony is greatest. Shout out your torments. Nurse with your shrieks the tempest which rages without, and adds terror to your last moments. Who complains that there is no light here? We shall have some soon in a flash of lightning, which it is to be hoped will make all of us its victims."

A dreadful pause now ensued; and nothing was heard but the voice of the storm without, and nothing seen except a very faint light at the opening at the head of the trap stair. But in a short time Jacoba's moans and rapid inspirations indicated that she was dying, while at intervals the rustling of the dry leaves upon which she lay, gave intimation of her bodily struggles. Gerald heard an exclamation uttered in a suppressed tone, and next moment, some one rushed past him, and hurriedly descending the wooden steps, plunged into the water below. He followed instantaneously, and found Letitia in the lower apartment, and supporting herself against the wall. The sea covered the floor to the depth of two feet, but she seemed scarcely aware of this circumstance, and on finding Gerald at her side, merely whispered "I could

bear it no longer." He contrived with some difficulty to seat her upon one of the higher steps, so that her feet might be out of the water, and placing himself so as to prevent her falling forwards, he awaited the retiring of the tide.

Her replies to his enquiries were conveyed in too low a tone to be intelligible, and they had at the same time a fearful incoherency. She remained nearly motionless for about a quarter of an hour, and then making a sudden and violent effort, succeeded in throwing herself forward from her seat, and dropped upon her face into the water. Scarcely a moment elapsed before Gerald lifted her up, and replaced her in her former situation, though while doing so, he felt an overwhelming anticipation that all his care would prove fruitless.

The dawn that succeeded that long weary night, was dark and dim. The ground exhaled a dense white vapour, and the slimy surface of the salt-marsh was ploughed into ravines and hollows by the action of the tide, which had risen to an unexampled height. The negroes whom Mrs. Dittersdorf had engaged to conduct the flight of Gerald and Lętitia, had conse-

quently been prevented from approaching their place of refuge at the time they had expected to be able to do. When the retiring of the water afforded access to the building, they found Letitia dead, and Gerald seated beside her body in a nearly unconscious state. Their purpose being thus superseded, they carried both individuals back to Sablegrove.

END OF VOL. I.

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